FUTURE

MAR. 20¢

SCIENCE FICTION *stories*

DEVIL'S CARGO

by Tom Wilson

GO TO THE ANT

by Walter Kubilius

FOUNTAIN OF DEATH

by Joseph Farrell

ALL STORIES NEW
NO REPRINTS

A DOUBLE-ACTION MAGAZINE



Virgil Finlay

MAR. 1952
FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION stories
ALL STORIES NEW
20¢

MEDICAL RESEARCH DISCOVERS TREATMENT FOR

PIMPLES

Acne, Blackheads, and other externally caused Skin Blemishes



DON'T LET UGLY PIMPLES BLEMISH YOUR PERSONALITY RUIN YOUR CONFIDENCE OR SPOIL YOUR TALENTS!

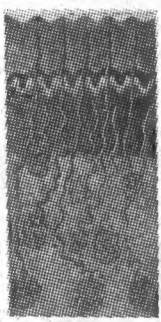
DO YOU feel your skin is holding back your chances for popularity . . . for success? Are you *afraid* people whom you'd like to know will *reject* you? Thousands of people who felt the same as you—now have clear attractive complexions. They've regained their poise and confidence. You can benefit from their experience!

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH REVEALS NEGLECT CAUSE OF MANY SKIN TROUBLES

Skin Specialists and Medical statistics tell us that broken out skin usually occurs from adolescence and can continue on through adulthood. Adolescents often carry these scars throughout their life. Many never get over the "feeling of embarrassment" and are always conscious of their appearance and complexion. Persistent cases of "bad skin" sometimes continue on through adulthood. In this stage of life, the responsibilities of earning a living and meeting people are essential if you are to climb the ladder of success in your job. It is doubly important to give your skin problems *immediate care.* Physicians state that to neglect your skin may prolong your skin troubles and make it more difficult to clear up. And, there is no better time to get pimples under control than NOW!

Laboratory analysis using special microscopes gives us the scientific facts regarding those unsightly pimples. High-powered lenses show your skin consists of several outer layers. Projecting through this epidermis, are hairs, the ducts of the sweat glands and the tiny tubes of the sebaceous glands which supply the skin with oil to keep it soft and pliable. Skin specialists will tell you that many skin eruptions can often be traced to an over-secretion, of oil from the sebaceous glands. As a result of this over-secretion, more oil than is normally required by the skin is deposited on the outside of the skin. Unless special care is taken, this excessive oil forms an oily coating which is a catch-all for all foreign matter in the air. When dust, dirt, lint, etc. become embedded into the tiny skin openings and block them up, they can cause the pores to become enlarged and therefore even more susceptible to additional dirt and dust. These enlarged, blocked up pores may form blackheads as soon as they become infected and bring you the worry, despair, embarrassment and humiliation of pimples, blackheads and other externally caused blemishes.

CAUSES OF PIMPLES AND BLACKHEADS SEEN THROUGH POWERFUL MICROSCOPE



Illustrated is a microscopic reproduction of a healthy skin:

The sebaceous glands are shown as they project through the many layers of skin. In a normal skin, the openings of the gland tubes are not blocked and permit the oil to flow freely to the outside of the skin.

DOCTORS RECOMMEND THIS TREATMENT

Physicians report two important ways to control this condition: First, they prescribe clearing the pores of clogging matter; and second, inhibit the excessive oiliness of the skin.

To help overcome these two conditions, Scope Products' research make available two scientifically-tested formulas that contain clinically proven ingredients. The first formula contains special cleansing properties not found in ordinary cold creams or skin cleansers. Thoroughly, but gently, it removed all surface scales, dried sebaceous matter, dust, dirt and debris—leaving your skin wonderfully soft, smooth and receptive to proper treatment. The second formula acts to reduce the excessive oiliness produced by the overactive sebaceous glands. Its active ingredients also help prevent the spread of infection by killing bacteria often associated with externally caused pimples, blackheads and blemishes.

DON'T SPREAD INFECTION BY SQUEEZING PIMPLES AND BLACKHEADS



Clinical reports state that many people squeeze out pimples and blackheads with their fingers. This is unsanitary and may lead to the spread of the infection. This abuse may also inflame your skin and leave red welts and ugly looking blotches and bumps. As a result your face may be covered with pimples and blemishes. Soon you'll be sorry you ever squeezed or picked at your skin by using this unscientific method to get rid of skin eruptions.

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IMMEDIATELY WITHOUT DELAY!

Just send your name and address to SCOPE PRODUCTS CO., Dept. DA-1, 1 Orchard Street, New York, N. Y. Be sure to print clearly. By return mail we will ship the Scope treatment to you in a plain package. When postman delivers the package, pay only $1.98 plus postage. Or send $2.00 now and we pay postage. No matter which way you order, you have a DOUBLE REFUND GUARANTEE. Don't delay, send for the Scope Medicated Skin treatment with its special "cover-up" action . . . today! Sorry no Canadian or foreign C.O.D.'S.

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FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION stories

Robert W. Lowndes, *Editor*

Volume 2 | March, 1952 | Number 6

★ ★ Feature Novelets ★ ★



DEVIL'S CARGO **Tom Wilson** 10

Jigger and his friends believe they're hi-jacking a priceless cargo of rine pelts, but it turns out to be live grellas, a Venusian delicacy. But, why can't they sell the grellas for a profit?

GO TO THE ANT **Walter Kubilius** 46

"If a real Martian landed here on Earth, men would kill him, Donnie," declared the boy's teacher. And Donnie wondered what to do about his visitor...

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Mallon has an unusual theory to explain a series of shipwrecks, and institutes as strange a search as was ever made.

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If he obeys the law, Barnes and his men will probably never return; if he will return, he'll have to face court martial for lawbreaking!

FOUNTAIN OF DEATH **Joseph Farrell** 70

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BEAUTIFUL, BEAUTIFUL, BEAUTIFUL! **Stuart Friedman** 79

Readers are requested to vote for this story only once!

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Cover by Virgil Finlay, from "Devil's Cargo"

Interior Illustrations by Kiemle, Luros, and Poulton

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You Practice COMMUNICATIONS

I send you parts to build this transmitter

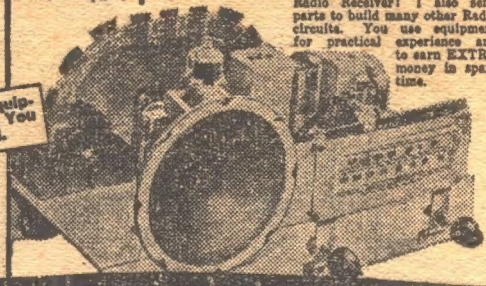


As part of my Communications Course you build this low power broadcasting transmitter, learn how to put a station "on the air," perform procedures demanded of Broadcast Station operators, make many tests.

This is just part of the equipment my students build. You keep all parts I send.

You Practice Radio SERVICING

on this modern radio you build with parts I send



As part of my Servicing Course, I send you the speaker, tubes, chassis, transformer, loop antenna, EVERYTHING you need to build this modern, powerful Radio Receiver! I also send parts to build many other Radio circuits. You use equipment for practical experience and to earn EXTRA money in spare time.

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NOW! Advanced Television Practice

Now, special TV kits furnished to build high-definition SCOPE . . . RF OSCILLATOR with flyback power supply . . . complete TV set . . . many other units. You see pulse, trapezoidal, saw-tooth wave forms. Get valuable PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE locating and correcting TV troubles. Mail coupon for facts, pictures and prices!

Learn Servicing or Communications Practice at Home in Spare Time



J. E. SMITH, President National Radio Institute

Do you want good pay, a job with a bright future and security? Would you like to have a profitable shop or store of your own? If so, find out how you can realize your ambition in the fast growing, prosperous RADIO-TELEVISION industry. Even without Television, the industry is bigger than ever before. 90 million home and auto Radios, 3100 Broadcasting Stations, expanding use of Aviation and Police Radio, Micro-wave Relay, Two-way Radio for buses, taxis, etc., are making opportunities for Servicing and Communications Technicians and FCC-Licensed Operators.

Television is TODAY'S Good Job Maker

In 1950, over 5,000,000 TV sets sold. By 1954, 25,000,000 TV sets estimated. Over 100 TV Stations now operating. Authorities predict 1,000 TV Stations. This means more jobs, good pay for qualified men all over the United States and Canada.

Many Make $10 Extra a Week in Spare Time

Keep your job while training. Hundreds of successful RADIO-TELEVISION TECHNICIANS I trained had no previous experience, some only a grammar school education. Learn Radio-Television principles from illustrated lessons. Get PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE—build valuable multitester—experiment with circuits common to Radio and Television. Keep all equipment. Many students make $5, $10 extra a week fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time. SPECIAL BOOKLETS start teaching you the day you enroll.

Send Now For 2 Books FREE—Mail Coupon

Send now for my FREE DOUBLE OFFER. You get actual Servicing lesson to show you how you learn at home. Also my 64-page book, "How to Be a Success in Radio-Television." Read what my graduates are doing, earning; see equipment you practice with at home. Send coupon in envelope or paste on postal. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 2CT, National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C. Our 38th Year.

I TRAINED THESE MEN

"I have been operating my own Servicing business. In two years I did $14,000 worth of business; net profit $6,000. Have one full time employee, an NRI student."—PHILLIP G. BROGAN, Louisville, Ky.



"Four years ago, I was a bookkeeper, with a hand-to-mouth salary. Now I am a Radio Engineer with a key station of the American Broadcasting Company network."—NORMAN H. WARD, Ridgefield Park, New Jersey.



"When halfway through the NRI course, I made $5 to $8 a week fixing sets in my spare time. Am now selling and installing Television sets and antennas."—E. J. STREITENBERGER, New Boston, O.

"My first job was operator with KDLR, obtained for me by your Graduate Service Dept. I am now Chief Engineer of Police Radio Station WQOX. I never hesitate to endorse NRI."—T. S. NORTON, Hamilton, Ohio.





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City..... Zone..... State.....

Approved for training under G. I. Bill



Down To Earth

It's open house to all letter-writers, strictly on an amateur basis, now; we have received many pleas to drop the payments for letters, and have decided to heed your wishes. As one fan put it, "Somehow, it seems to take all the fun out of writing letters, because the commercial angle makes me feel as if I have to turn out a professional-looking job. I'd rather write what I feel like writing, without having to wonder whether I'll get a check."

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

As I read Mr. Marlow's critique on *Out of the Atomfire*, I easily demolished each of the objections as they arose.

It would have been nothing for me to have dashed off the various abstruse atomic formulae, which would have set at rest the doubts expressed in the letter. A sudden thought struck me, however. As well as I understand atomic structure, Ross Rocklynne understands it even better.

Actually, the boy is a whiz! I could practically see him out there in California, itching to show why *Out of the Atomfire* was scientifically accurate, right down to the last indivisible particle. I am not a selfish person. I decided to let Rocklynne have his fun.

You may be interested to know some of the background on *Out of the Atomfire*.

I made some minor changes in Rocklynne's original script, completely re-writing it, improving the characters, the plot, and the action. The scientific detail, however, I followed to the last letter, writing at my usual terrific pace.

I am so confident of Rocklynne's ideas, that I simply included them as they came, meantime marvelling at the brain which had developed the mathematics behind them. So confident was I of the scientific detail, indeed, that it would have been an utter waste of time to question it. I am surprised that someone has!

As a matter of fact, after reading Mr. Marlow's letter, I laughed quietly to myself. When it comes to scientific errors, Rocklynne can make a monkey out of anybody!

I'm grateful for your liking of the story, Mr. Marlow. Sincerely,

—Bryce Walton

Dear Bob:

I noted Mr. Marlow's comments on *Out of the Atomfire* in *Future*. I was about to sit down at the typewriter with my favorite tomes on calculus and advanced physics and explain these points, one by one, when I suddenly recalled that Bryce Walton is not only a fine writer, but a fine scientist as well. Why deprive Bryce of this opportunity to explain a few of the more obscure points of atomic physics, I reflected? It is by this kind of inner searching of my own motives that I sometimes circumvent a desire to hog all the glory.

So I intend to leave Bryce a clear field. His account will not only be lucid, but entertaining as well.

Actually, I would have liked to collaborate with Bryce on a reply. Unfortunately, and for a reason I never could ascertain, Bryce left California shortly after *Out of the Atomfire* appeared on the

[*Turn To Page* 8]

I need 500 Men to wear SAMPLE SUITS!



PAY NO MONEY — SEND NO MONEY!

My values in made-to-measure suits are so sensational, thousands of men order when they see the actual garments. I make it easy for you to get your own suit to wear and show—and to MAKE MONEY IN FULL OR SPARE TIME! MY PLAN IS AMAZING! Just take a few orders at my low money-saving prices—that's all! Get your own personal suit, and make money fast taking orders. You need no experience. You need no money now or any time. Just rush your name and address for complete facts and BIG SAMPLE KIT containing more than 100 actual woolen samples. It's FREE! Get into the big-pay tailoring field and earn up to $15.80 in a day! Many men are earning even more! You can begin at once in spare time to take orders and pocket big profits. All you do is show the big, colorful different styles. Men order quickly because you offer fine quality at unbeatable prices. Yes—superb made-to-measure cutting and sewing—and complete satisfaction guaranteed. It's easy to get first orders, but repeat orders come even easier. With my big, complete line you begin earning big money at once and you build a steady, big-profit repeat business at the same time.

No Experience — No Money Needed

EVERYTHING SUPPLIED FREE!

You need no money—no experience—no special training. Your friends, neighbors, relatives, fellow-workers, will be eager to give you orders once you show them the outstanding quality of the fabrics, the top notch fit of made-to-measure tailoring and the money-saving low prices. Every customer is a source of additional prospects. In no time at all, you'll find the orders rolling in faster and faster. And every order puts a handsome, spot-cash profit in your pocket! Mail the coupon for your big FREE OUTFIT of styles and samples NOW!

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Mail Coupon for FREE OUTFIT!

We supply everything—sample fabrics, full-color style cards, order forms, measuring materials—all packed in a handsome, professional leatherette-covered carrying case. Work full time or spare time. Either way you'll be amazed at how fast you take orders and how your profits begin to amount! Fill out and mail coupon today.

Send No Money — Mail Today — No Obligation

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Dear Sirs I WANT A SAMPLE SUIT TO WEAR AND SHOW, without paying 1c for it. Rush Valuable Suit Coupon and Sample Kit of actual fabrics. ABSOLUTELY FREE.

Name

Address

City State

stands. It was not, of course, some scientific discrepancy which he had included in the yarn, while I was not looking, that made him leave. I am sure of that. Nor could it possibly have been that he completely changed the plot, the characters, and the action from my original script. No, he must have left California merely because he is a man of strong impulses, sudden moods—besides being a genius, a positive genius in many ways.

Anyway, I do think only a genius could explain Mr. Marlow's objections the way he would like them explained. I am sure Bryce will appreciate the opportunity.

Thank you, Mr. Marlow, for liking the story. Sincerely,

—*Ross Rocklynne.*

(*Now* aren't you readers glad that I restrained myself, instead of answering Mr. Marlow's questions when I ran his letter? It's a terrible temptation to spread out my ignorance at the slightest excuse, but this time I decided that the authors should be free to have a go with theirs.)

●

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I have been reading *Future* since its reinception a little over a year and a half ago, and have finally succumbed to the urge to write you a few comments and opinions about the magazine.

First of all, I *like* it. Despite the rather dog-eared pages, lurid covers, and crude illustrating, I enjoy reading the stories in *Future*. Looking back over your past issues, I recall quite a few fine stories whose qualities are belied by your format. My favorites among these are Leinster's *Nobody Saw the Ship*, Leiber's *Martians, Keep Out!*, del Rey's *Shadows of Empire*, the two de Camp stories, *Wide-Open Planet*, and *Ultrasonic God*, Loomis' *Lithium Mountain*, and Blish's *Elixir*. All these, I feel, stack up well beside the material used by any other magazines in the field.

But, of course, it's not only the cream of a magazine's stories which decide its quality. I've found that most of *Future's* other fiction is usually interesting and enjoyable (with certain exceptions, of course). And I particularly like the departments and letters.

My pet irritation is, as you may have gathered, the format. I know you have gone through this sort of thing many times before; the readers say: "Why don't you put your magazine out on smooth paper, with trimmed edges and color illustration?" The editor replies succintly: "$$$". I'm not interested in trimmed edges, etc., but there are a few changes I'd welcome.

First of all, there's the covers. The publishers of pulp-size science-fiction magazines seem to suffer collectively from what might be called a "snatch-sale mania". Apparently, the majority of sales are visualized as occurring in the following manner:

Joe Commuter, waiting for the 8:37, is searching the depot newsstand for a magazine to read on the train. His eyes leap from *Gory Mystery* to *Smoochy Love Stories*, seeking something to interest himself. Suddenly, two events take place. a) The 8:37 streaks into the station—or wheezes in, depending on the railroad. b) He happens to glance at a cover painting which, in subtle tints of crimson and orange, shows an assortment of monsters, spaceships, and undraped damsels against an alien setting. The train is about to depart, so Joe deposits a quarter on the counter, grabs his copy of *Future*, and dashes for the doors, catching the nickel which the dealer flings at him as he steps aboard. This is the first and last time Joe will ever open a science-fiction magazine; but, for the nonce, he has been roped in by the "snatch-sale" method.

Personally, I think this theory is a lot of hogwash. It may hold true for other pulp magazine sales, but in all seriousness, I believe that science-fiction is different in this respect. At present, the field is enjoying a remarkable popularity; new readers are continually coming into the fold. And I don't think these people are interested in how glaring a cover can be—they want to read science-fiction, yes, but they'd prefer a magazine which they wouldn't be ashamed to be seen with on the streets. And so, in defiance of Confucius, or whoever wrote that proverb, they judge the books by their covers, picking out a conservative-looking one (relatively speaking, of course). Science-fiction readership seems to be undergoing a basic change in makeup, and it may be that the magazines which cling to the old methods will be left in the lurch. (Then again, *Future* has outlasted several of its contemporary revivals and newcomers. But you could at least get Finlay to do those covers of yours.)

I also take issue with your artists, who stretch the stories in every conceivable manner to inject "cheesecake" into their illustrations. And the exorbitant ratio of advertising space to the magazine's length is another of *Future's* less endearing aspects. But, of course, that isn't a matter of editorial policy.

To sum it up: I think that *Future* is quite a good job from the angle of fiction, but its format detracts from the general impression it presents to the reading public. However, as long as you keep up the present story quality, I'll be a steady reader.

Morton D. Paley,
1455 *Townsend Avenue,*
New York 52, *New York.*

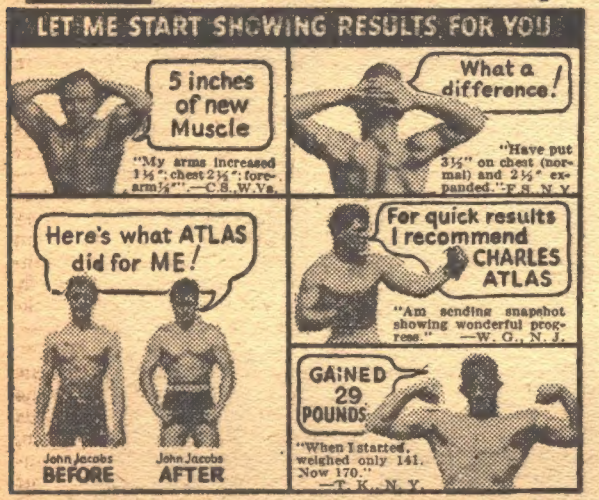
(Let's examine your logic in the analysis of the "snatch-sale", where you conclude that "Joe Commuter" will never come back for more, even though he was roped in once.

First of all, what does your logic as-

[*Turn To Page* 82]



Will You Let Me PROVE I Can Make YOU a *New Man?*





CHARLES ATLAS

Awarded the title of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" in international contest — in competition with ALL men who would consent to appear against him.

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"We almost got Jigger and that Cardis gal when they were wrecked last year. Our ships spotted them, but another hi-jacker picked them up before we could get there."

DEVIL'S CARGO

Feature Novelet by Tom Wilson

Something had gone wrong; instead of the priceless rine furs they expected, this cargo consisted of live grellas. But Jigger and his gang could still make a profit—only, they didn't know something very important about this Venusian delicacy . . .



"MAISIE'S face was pale green. "I don't feel so good, Walt. This fallin' hurts my stummick."

"Yeah." Walt twisted, and the motion floated him from his ack cushion. Harness-webbing caught him gently and brought him back. "Whyn't ya jazz th' burner, Jigger? Le's catch th' pod an' get it over with; makes me noivous floatin' out here in nothin'."

Jigger's eyes were intent on the radar scope. "What d'ya think I'm doin', dopey?"

"I wanta get outa here," Maisie said weakly. She was sick.

"You want I should find ya an asteroid, maybe," Jigger remarked sarcastically.

"My Gawd," Maisie wailed. "All over me. Do somethin', Walt; make that big ape do somethin'."

"There's a towel in the pocket o' your ack cushion," Jigger said wearily. "I told ja t'keep th' bag ready. Messin' up the cabin, stinkin' up the place." He shot a sullen glance at Walt. "What the hell you wanta bring 'er along for?"

"Aw, shaddup." Walt leaned forward, staring through the porthole at the hard black of space. "I don't see nothin' out there yet; whyn't ya juice th' burner again?"

"We gotta match speed. If we come up on the pod too fast, we might lose it. Hafta brake an' jockey too much—use up too much fuel."

"Yeah?" Walt grunted dubiously. "Looks like we'd find it faster if ya cruise around an' hunt for th' thing."

"You nuts?" Jigger snorted. "You could cruise a lifetime huntin' pods out here an' never find one. Not unless you had a flight curve to work on."

"Make 'im hurry up, Walt," Maisie wailed. "I'm gonna lose. . ."

She did.

"For gawdsake, get that bag on 'er, Walt."

Maisie was sick again, and Walt



There have been many stories of "super-scientific criminals" of the future, particularly dealing with the interplanetary milieu. But it seems to me that "criminals" of times to come will not be too much different from those we know today, in a number of important aspects. What we loosely call the "criminal mind" amounts to an orientation and general set of attitudes toward society. This orientation can be more or less summed up in such phrases as, "The world owes me a living", "There's one born every minute", etc. The "criminal" can be considered as a parasite upon society, operating more or less adjacent to the laws of the society. In other words, such persons do not necessarily see how many laws they can fracture, just for the hell of it, but simply do not consider any particular law which inconveniences them, as applicable to them. It seems to me, further, then, that such persons, generally, would not take the trouble to study "science", or to attain "scientific attitudes"; that kind of work they would consider as fit only for the suckers on whom they preyed. Thus, our future "criminals", as with such persons past and present, would have to be sharp-witted, ingenious in many ways, and capable of hard work and endurance in some directions—which they decided would pay off. But they'd most likely be woefully ignorant of basic scientific matters—much like the "honest man in the street" —and this ignorance might often be as dangerous as Mr. Wilson outlines in this story.

cursed. "For cripes sake, ja hafta spill it on me?"

Jigger watched the scope. "Space-sick dames," he muttered.

"I don't feel good, honey." Maisie's voice was muffled.

"You'll feel a helluva lot worse if you spill it on me again," Walt said coldly. He surveyed Maisie critically. "Ya oughta see yourself; you look awful. Hey, Jigger, looka Maisie. Don't she look awful? Ja ever see such a mess?"

Jigger grunted.

Maisie began to weep.

"Think I'll find another doll t'give a few rine pelts to," Walt mused. "Even a rine coat wouldn't help your looks—not th' way ya look now. Don't she look awful, Jigger?"

Maisie's weeping stopped. She looked at Walt and her face was white and cold. "If you don't gimme a rine coat, I'll kill you, Walt," she said hoarsely. "After what I been through on this stinkin' hijack, I swear I'll kill you."

Walt laughed. "Sure, baby, sure. Ya hear that, Jigger?"

"All my life I wanted a rine coat. Genuwine Ganymedan fur, jus' like the video stars wear. 'Member I showed you the one Sunny Day's uncle sent 'er—the one the louse of a brother-in-law stole?"

"Huh?"

"On the video, stupid."

Walt chuckled. "Ya mean that soap-opera thing?"

"Yeah. I want a coat jus' like Sunny's."

"Yeah, baby—sure."

"You promise, Walt?"

"Sure, sure, I told ja, didn' I? You'll getcha coat. If we get th' pelts."

"What d'ya mean, 'if?' We gonna get 'em when we hijack the whatcha-macallit, ain't we?"

"Yeah. But we ain't found th' damn pod yet. How about it, Jigger? Any sign?"

"Oughta be comin' in on the scope any minute now. If Toots got the right dope on the flight curve."

"Toots better have got th' right dope," Walt snarled. "I got my dough in this deal."

"Yeah, you got a lousy fifteen grand in it. Fifteen grand for a haul worth a couple hundred-thou. An' who's done all the work? Toots shines up to that sucker of a freight checker at Handlan's t'get the curve; I rent the farm an' pilot the burner. An' I got the freight shover's ticket. Maybe you think the cops won't check shover licenses when the pod o' pelts don't show up."

"Aw, they'll think a meteor got it."

MAISIE asked, "What're these pods you birds keep yappin' about?"

"Detachable cargo carriers," Jigger said. "You wanta ship somethin' from Mars, maybe, to Earth. The shippin' company loads your stuff inna pod at the port an' seals the pod. A burner hitches on an' lifts the pod space-side; the shover runnin' the burner starts the pod on its flight curve, then cuts loose."

"Just like a truck cab an' trailer," Walt said, "with th' trailer coastin' downhill."

"Yeah. The burner goes back for another load. A burner that ain't workin' is losin' money."

"What keeps the pod goin' when the burner unhitches?" Maisie asked wonderingly.

Jigger laughed. "There ain't nothin' t'*stop* it; not in space."

"It just keeps goin'?"

"Yeah. At the terminal end, another burner comes out, hitches to the pod, an' lands it. Hey, there's somethin'" Jigger bent over the scope.

"Ya see th' pod?"

"Yeah. See that blip?"

"I don't see nothin' outside."

"Ya can't see it through the port, ya dope. Not yet. Look at the scope."

"Yeah. Looka th' scope, Maisie. See?"

"That don't look like nothin' to me. How much longer we gotta wait?"

"Yeah, how much longer, Jigger?"

"Ten, fifteen minutes."

Jigger's hands moved over the controls, and the burner shuddered and lurched as he jockeyed. Slowly the blip grew.

"A coat of real rine fur," Maisie said softly. "For me. Thinka that, Walt. The kinda coat I dreamed about ever since I was a kid."

"Thinka all th' dough, baby, thinka th' dough. This'll be a real stake; we'll be big shots."

"So soft," Maisie mused, "an' so thick. They say it's awful cold on Ganymede where the rines come from, Walt. Awful cold. That's what makes the fur so good, ain't it, Walt? The cold?"

"Yeah, baby."

"And they cost so much 'cause they come from so far, huh?"

"Yeah. Th' trappers have t'live in domes an' work in bulgers."

"They do, huh? That must be awful; I wouldn' wanta do that, would you, honey?"

"Naw, baby. Not me. Looka there—through th' port. Ya can see the pod. See it there, baby?"

"Yeah. Jus' thinkin' of all those furs inside it makes me all shivery an' warm, honey. I always dreamed of a real rine coat."

"You said that."

"Huh? Did I?"

"Looka th' big twenty-nine painted on it, Jigger. That's th' one we're after, ain't it? Number twenty-nine?"

"Yeah."

JIGGER played with the feather jets, moving the hulk of the burner

with delicate blasts. Sweat stood out on his forehead and he cursed. A shriek of metallic protest came from the belly of the ship. "He's gonna kill us," Maisie screamed. "I won't get my coat."

"Shaddup," Walt snarled.

The hull shuddered again as metal grated against metal. Jigger grunted and slapped a switch. The grating died in a thud, and all was quiet. "Lousy hookup," Jigger said disgustedly. "I'm gettin' rusty."

"It's over?" Walt demanded. "We got th' pod?"

"Yeah, I got it on the magnet. Soon's I get the hydraulic grabs set an' locked, we'll head back."

"Jus' thinka all them furs right under us," Maisie sighed. "Real rine furs. When can I see 'em, Walt?"

"You got plenty o'time for that; we goin' to land at th' farm, Jigger?"

"Yeah. I burnt off the pasture behind the house so the blast marks won't show. You know what to do when we get there?"

"Sure. You gonna leave right off?"

"Yeah. I gotta blast back out here an' pick up that pod for Strake like I promised. That was the only way he'd rent us the burner, an' it's a good idea, too. We'll all have a cover if the cops get too nosy."

"Think Strake'll keep his mouth shut?"

"Sure, long as we don't bust up his burner." Jigger laughed softly. "He's got his dough; that's all he's interested in. If he cracked, he'd be in trouble hisself. Plenty trouble."

"Yeah, I guess so."

The burner shuddered as Jigger opened the jets.

"Real rine fur," Maisie murmured. "Jus' like I always dreamed about..."

●

JIGGER swung the copter over the farm in a lazy circle. "Barn looks real good, don't it, Toots? Just like a real barn. Walt done a good job."

"Yeah," Toots answered in a bored



tone. "Let's get down an' get a drink, Jigger. My Gawd, I'm dry."

"Okay." He set the copter down near the house.

Walt and Maisie came out to meet them. "Hi, Toots."

"Hi, Walt."

"We gonna open the furs now, Jigger? I jus' gotta feel them furs. Can ya imagine, Toots, real rine. A whole pod stuffed with 'em."

Walt linked his arm with Toots'. "Maybe Toots an' Jigger want a drink first, baby. How about it, Toots?"

"Yeah. My Gawd, I'm dry."

"I could use one," Jigger said; "I'm bushed."

"One quick one, then we'll open the furs, huh?" Maisie asked eagerly.

"We got plenty time, baby. Plenty time for that." Walt squeezed Toots' arm.

"You didn't have no trouble gettin' the barn built around the pod, huh, Walt?"

"Naw." He held the door open for Toots, and Maisie and Jigger followed them into the house. "Then pneumoforms went up smooth as silk. Took me a hour or so t'spray th' plastic on."

"Looks real good from the air."

"Yeah. I took th' copter up after I finished t'check it."

"You shoulda heard Walt cuss when the spray nozzle jammed," Maisie chuckled.

Walt scowled.

"Where's the bar?" Toots demanded. "I'm dry."

"How's about scarin' us up some drinks, baby?" Walt asked Maisie.

"Cripes," she said wearily. "I dream about a real rine coat all my life. Here I got dozens of 'em in the back

yard, an' can I even look at 'em? No, I gotta make drinks yet."

"Need any help?" Jigger inquired without enthusiasm.

Maisie swished away without answering.

Walt grinned familiarly at Toots. "How'd ya get th'dope outa that sucker at Handlan's, baby? You really had 'im on th' hook, huh?"

Toots smiled. "Well..." Casually she peeled off her coat. The waist of her Egyptian revival dress snuggled beneath her high, firm breasts, exaggerating the nudity of her torso. She lowered her eyes demurely. "My new outfit may have helped."

Walt whistled softly. "You got somethin' there, baby; you really got somethin' there." His eyes caressed Toots boldly.

Jigger squirmed. "Don't a jacket or somethin' come with that, Toots?"

Toots turned on Jigger, bouncing with indignation. "Don't you start on that again. I notice you keep your eyes glued on every dame wearin' 'em. They boggle out like they was on stems, lookin' so hard."

"Okay, okay."

"I work on that dopey checker two weeks gettin' that flight curve an' you start squallin' about my new dress. Ya'd think my figger wasn't good or somethin'."

"Ain't nothin' wrong with your figger, baby," Walt said warmly.

Toots puffed herself with a deep breath, cutting her eyes at Walt. "Jigger got the pod from the dope I give 'im, didn't he? What right's he got bellyachin'?"

"Okay, Toots. I don't wanta hear no more." Jigger's voice was quiet with warning.

Walt laughed with false heartiness. "We're all sorta jumpy now it's over; we need a drink. Where th'hell's Maisie?"

MAISIE came in with a tray of bottles and glasses.

"How d'ya like Toots' new dress, baby?"

Maisie's face hardened as her eyes scanned Toots' bareness. "Kinda skimpy, ain't it? Don't think I'd want one, myself; want me to make your drink, Walt?"

"Yeah."

Toots let her gaze run contemptuously over Maisie's plump form. "No, you wouldn't want this kinda dress, Maisie. It shows up what you got."

Maisie turned belligerently. "What the hell you mean by that crack, ya little beanpole?"

Toots raised her arms, stretching lauguidly. Her waist was willowy, and the contours of her bosom rolled and swelled gracefully with her motion. Walt watched appreciatively.

"You damn little tramp," Maisie muttered. "If you're tryin' to start somethin' with me..."

"Come on," Jigger said loudly. "Let's all get a drink, huh?" He slipped his arm firmly around Toots' waist, shaking her playfully.

Toots giggled. "Sure, let's get a drink; Gawd, I'm dry.."



SOMETHING hit Jigger's nose, hard. He came up from the depths of sleep, spluttering. Maisie was standing over him beating wildly at his face, yelling and sobbing; she looked crazy.

Jigger covered his head and rolled to a sitting position, then pushed Maisie away and stood. She rushed at him like an animal, spitting and clawing. He slapped her with everything he had, and she sat on her rump; her eyes rounded at him in bewilderment and she began to bawl.

Jigger scrubbed his hand over his face and ran his tongue around his mouth. It tasted brown. "What the hell, Maisie? You gone nuts?"

"My coat—the real rine coat like I always dreamed about—I ain't gonna get it. Damn your lousy soul, Jigger, you stole my coat."

"What the hell you talkin' about? You gone off your rocker?"

"There ain't no rines. Damn you, you knew there wasn't no rines." Maisie rocked back and forth on the floor, covering her face with her hands. "Oh, cripes," she moaned, "I did so want a real rine coat jus' like Sunny's. And there ain't no rines."

Jigger walked to the tray and poured himself a stiff shot. Toots and Walt weren't around—must have slipped off while he dozed on the sofa. "Damn little tramp," he muttered.

The drink burned. He worked the taste of it around the inside of his lips and felt better. He poured another and coaxed Maisie to down it. She stopped blubbering and stood up; her face was still and stupid with a lost look. Jigger noticed that the bottom of her dress was holed by tiny tears and thin red scratches crisscrossed her legs.

"Okay, what's wrong?" he asked her quietly.

Her eyes swung to him unfocused. "Huh?"

He slapped her face sharply. She covered her head, whimpering. "Okay," she mumbled. "Okay."

Jigger shook her shoulders savagely. "Tell me what the hell's wrong," he hissed.

She nodded and he let her go. "There ain't no rines," she said stupidly. "Not even one."

"You been at the pod?"

"Uh huh. Not even one. I could make a scarf outa one, maybe, even if there wasn't enough for a whole coat. But there ain't even one."

Jigger glanced at the windows; it was dark outside. He must have slept three, four hours. He picked up a flashlight from a table and grabbed Maisie's arm. "C'mon," he said gruffly.

She came, walking as if she were asleep; her plump flesh had a stiff, un-alive feel to his hand.

The wind outdoors was cold, its passage through the dying trees mournful. Jigger shivered as he tried to get his bearings. He didn't like the country; it gave him the creeps. Where was the damn barn? He tried to remember the layout of the place, waving the torch from side to side. Its beam was pale, lost in the wind and the shadows.

His fingers bit into Maisie's arm. "Where the hell's the barn? The pod?"

Without answering, she began to walk. He went with her, gripping her elbow, making the light dance feebly ahead. Trees loomed around them, and dead leaves were crisp and slick underfoot. He felt like he was walking on glass and cursed.

Then he remembered: the pasture was separated from the house by the trees and the stream; the stream was nowhere ahead. The chill of the wind shrivelled his skin and made him numb.

"Toots an' Walt out here?" His words were thin, whipped from his mouth almost before they became sound.

"No."

"I'll fix that little tramp..."

THE GROUND sloped down, and dry, snaky briars clutched at his clothes and scratched his flesh. Maisie walked through the briars without seeming to feel them. The stream sent its low, laughing note into the keening of the wind, and Jigger stopped at the edge. "How the hell we get across? Ain't there no bridge?"

Maisie waded into the water. Jigger shivered as he saw it wash against her knees. "She's nuts," he muttered.

He moved along the bank and spotted a stone in the middle of the stream. He jumped. His foot slipped and he fell, splashing heavily in the icy water. The light sank, glowing dimly on the bottom; he fished it out, cursing, and floundered across.

Maisie had turned to wait, and now she walked on. He shambled after her, teeth chattering as he slapped at his sopping clothes. The barn loomed ahead. Jigger wrenched the door open and staggered in, grateful for shelter from the biting wind.

The barn was a shell filled by the pod. Light spilled from the pod's open lock, and Jigger went toward the light. The inside of the pod was lined with padded racks, and in the racks were plastic bubbles. Each bubble held an animal, apparently asleep.

Jigger cursed. "Grellas. Damn grellas."

Slowly he raised his hands and looked at them. The skin was puckered and blue, and he was freezing. He'd have to get back to the house, get some dry clothes...

He moved back to the lock. Maisie was standing there, staring stupidly in. "I always wanted a rine coat," she said dully. "Ever since I was a little kid. But there ain't no rines; not even one."

Jigger spied a cutting torch near the lock. "You burn off the seal, Maisie?"

"Yeah. I wanted t'feel a real rine against my skin. Like I always dreamed about."

"Wha'd it say on the seal?"

"I dunno; I didn't bother t'read it. I wanted to feel a real rine pelt. Jus' oncet."

"Yeah. C'mon, we gotta get back..."

●

When Jigger came downstairs, Walt and Toots were in the room with Maisie.

"Hello, Jigger." Toots smiled at him, and he saw fear behind the archness of her lips.

"What's th' idea havin' Maisie wake us up?" Walt said loudly; his eyes dodged Jigger's.

Maisie slouched in a chair, staring at nothing. She had kicked off her shoes, but the hem of her dress still showed a dark line of wet from the stream. Her legs were streaked with blood.

Jigger looked at them silently, moving his shoulders against the dry cloth of his shirt. He had changed his clothes, but the cold of the outside night still clung to him. He strode to the tray, poured a drink, and downed it neat.

The spark of the liquor ignited the banked anger within him. "You." He padded toward Toots, his hands working.

She stood, backing from him, her eyes widening with fright. "I ain't done nothin', Jigger." She tried to smile. "Honest, Jigger, I ain't done nothin'..."

He grabbed the neck of her robe and ripped it open. The flesh around her bosom was rayed with red streaks. "Damn little tramp." He hit her across the mouth with the back of his hand. She staggered against the wall, lifting her fingers to the slow trickle from her lip.

"Stop it," she screamed, "stop it."

Jigger's hands dropped to his sides. "You ain't worth it," he said softly; he turned slowly and walked to a chair.

Toots shuddered with dry sobs.

"Looka here, Jigger, that ain't no way t'treat a doll." Walt started toward Toots.

"If you touch her again, I'll kill you," Jigger said quietly.

Walt stopped. "Looka here, Jigger, we're pals. I got fifteen grand in this deal..."

"If I catch you foolin' with my woman again, I'll cut a fifteen grand hunk outa you where it'll do the most good."

Walt looked at Jigger and licked his lips. "Wasn' nothin' like that, Jigger; you got it all wrong. You was passed out an' Maisie was gone, party was dead. Me an' Toots jus' got sleepy, was all. Wasn' nothin' like you think, Jigger..."

"Shaddup."

"Sure, Jigger, sure. I was jus' tellin' you..."

"Shaddup."

"Yeah, Jigger. Sure." Walt sat down.

"My coat," Maisie said. "My coat's gone, Walt."

"Huh? What coat?"

"My real rine coat, like the one Sunny Day had, remember? You prom-

ised me a coat jus' like Sunny's an' now it's gone. There ain't even a little one for a scarf, Walt. Not even one."

"What's she yappin' about?"

"The pod," Jigger said. "It's full of grellas. There ain't no rines."

"Huh?"

"Yeah."

MAISIE nodded solemnly. "Like I told you, Walt. My coat's gone. The one outa real rine fur, like I always dreamed about. It ain't there."

"You're both nuts," Walt shouted. "It's gotta be there; the rine pelts has gotta..."

Three pairs of eyes swung toward Toots. "No." She cowered against the wall. "No. My Gawd, I wouldn't doublecross you..."

"Tell us about it, baby." Jigger's voice was deceptively gentle.

"Cripes, you mean my fifteen grand..."

"She stole my coat, Walt. I thought it was Jigger, but it was her. She's jealous, Walt; she don't want me t'wear real rine like Sunny Day."

"Shut up," Jigger said. He looked at Toots. "Better get yourself a drink, baby; you're gonna need it."

"It wasn't my fault, Jigger. Honest, it wasn't my fault. You know I wouldn't..."

"Get that drink, baby." Jigger watched her across the room. The alcohol bought twin spots to her cheeks. "Now tell us about it, baby. An' it better be good."

"Yeah, sure. I..." Toots turned in the center of the floor, searching helplessly for a way out.

"Sit down."

"Sure." She swallowed furtively and sat.

"You got the dope on the pod from the checker at Handlan's like you told me?"

"Yeah."

"Okay. Pick it up."

"I latched onta this guy in the bar, see, like you told me..."

"What's the guy's name?"

"Benson. Frank Benson. You know his name, Jigger; you told me who..."

"Yeah."

"He goes to this bar every day after work, for a beer. I picked 'im up easy. He's a little skinny guy, kinda pale. Sorta shy little duck. Got a wife an' two kids. Oncet the ice was broke, he talked a mile a minute. Smart, see? Got a college degree an' all; said he liked t'talk t'me even if I didn't understand what he was talkin' about."

"The pod, baby. The pod."

"Yeah. Me an' Benson got chummy, see? Day before yesterday when I met 'im at the bar, he says he's gotta go back an' work overtime. Special job comin' in, he said, an' he hadda work out the flight curve for the terminal end. I pumped 'im about this special job, an' he says it's animals. Animals from out Jupiter way. My Gawd, what kinda animals could ja ship in from out Jupiter way but rines? Rine pelts?"

Jigger nodded. "Okay."

"So I says, C'mon up t'my place, Frank. I'll fix ya a steak an' a couple beers an' you can work there. He says okay. I got the flight curve dope from his figgers an' give 'em to you, Jigger."

"That's all?"

"So help me, Jigger, you gotta believe me. Why should I try to cross you, Jigger? You believe me, don't you, Jigger?"

"Yeah, baby," Jigger said heavily, "I believe you."

"What the hell are we gonna do?" Walt whined. "I got fifteen grand in this deal. I ain't gonna lose it 'cause some dumb doll loused up th' works."

"She stole my coat, Walt; she don't want I should have a real rine coat like Sunny's."

"Shaddup," Jigger said impatiently. "Lemme think."

"Grellas," Toots mused. "A pod fulla grellas. What d'ya know."

WALT ASKED incredulously. "Grellas like ya eat? Th' same kind like ya get in restaurants?"

"Yeah," Jigger snapped. "Grellas

like you eat; little animals what come from Venus."

"What's so special about these grellas, huh?"

"Maybe they're pedigreed breedin' stock or somethin'," Toots said.

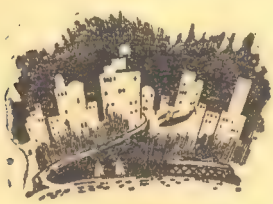
"You can't raise grellas on Earth," Jigger mumbled. "Won't breed. They're sealed in hiberno, though; must be some reason for keepin' 'em alive."

"Maybe we could trade 'em for some rine pelts, huh, honey?" Maisie asked hopefully.

"Nuts."

Jigger snapped his fingers. "Gimme a pencil an' paper, somebody; maybe we can get somethin' outa this yet..."

●



Toots entered the kitchen, knuckling her eyes sleepily. Maisie was at the sink cutting up something with a long knife.

"G'mornin'. Where're the boys?"

Maisie glanced over her shoulder briefly. "Gone to the city."

"Already? Cripes, it ain't nine o'clock yet. What's the big rush?"

"You wanta sleep all day?"

"No sense gettin' up at the bust o' dawn. What the boys gonna do this time o' day?"

"Sell grellas."

"Yeah? What's for breakfast?"

"Coffee. Toast an' eggs—if you wanta fix it. I'm gonna fry some grella inna minute."

"That what you're cuttin' up? Grella?"

"Yeah."

Toots watched Maisie's capable hands wield the long knife and shuddered. "You look like you enjoy slicin' that thing."

"My old man was a butcher."

Toots poured a cup of black coffee, sat down at the table, and lighted a cigarette. "What we supposed to do today? Sit out here in the sticks?"

Maisie plopped several chunks of meat into a pan and it began to sizzle. "Not me. I'm goin' to town, after I eat. Ain't no video in this dump. I wanta see Sunny Day. Her uncle's due back from Mars, her boy friend's about t'lose his job on accounta the no good brother-in-law, an' her mother's gotta get the serum. An' there's the baby."

"Huh?"

"Sunny Day, stupid. On the video. You know, *A Little Sunshine in your Life.*"

"Oh. You watch that junk?"

"Junk?" Maisie said indignantly. "What d'ya mean, junk?"

"Skip it."

"Sunny had a real rine coat oncet. Jus' like the kind I was gonna get. The no good brother-in-law hooked it t'get outa a jam."

"Oh?

"Yeah. Want some grella?"

"No thanks." Toots wrinkled her nose at the pungent odor as Maisie dropped the steaming pieces on the table. "I tried some once; don't like it."

"You don't know what's good," Maisie mumbled around a mouthful of grella.

"You better not eat too much o' that stuff yourself. You'd oughta watch your figger, Maisie."

Maisie stopped chewing and glared at Toots. "I'm gettin' tired o' those cracks about me bein' fat, see?"

"Sure. Jus' friendly advice is all."

"Walt likes me plump," Maisie said complacently.

Toots lowered her eyes and smiled.

"Wish there was some way I could get a real rine coat," Maisie sighed. "I always dreamed about havin' one, an' this time I thought, Jackpot—

That's jus' what I thought when Jigger hitched onta that pod out yonder. Jackpot—" She shrugged. "Well, like Sunny says, that's life, I guess. Maybe someday it'll be different..."



COPTERS swarmed over the city like gnats about a dog's head. Jigger picked an opening in one of the lower traffic patterns.

"I still don't like it, Jigger," Walt said darkly. "I don't like it."

"What's that you don't like?"

"Th' grellas."

"Listen, ya dope, we got over two thousand grellas. Them things'll sell in the markets for twenty five bucks apiece. Even if we only get fifteen for ours, that's thirty grand, ain't it? You wanta throw thirty grand out the window?"

Walt shook his head. "Naw. But I don't like it."

"You got fifteen grand in this deal yourself, remember. You wanta get that back with a little somethin' extra doncha?"

"Sure, but I'm kinda leery about these grellas. Rines, now, like I thought we was gonna get, I know somethin' about. I had Morty Silverstein lined up t'handle 'em for us. Morty'll give ya top prices. Best fur fence in th' business. But grellas... We don't know nothin' about grellas; might as well try t'sell chickens or turkeys."

"Cripes, what d'ya need to know about 'em? People eat 'em, don't they? Ain't that enough t'know?"

"I dunno. Maybe. Gimme a butt, willya? I'm out."

Jigger passed a pack of cigarettes. Walt blew smoke at the instrument panel. "Who's th' guy we're gonna see? Pal o' yours?"

"I done business with 'im."

Walt chuckled knowingly. "When you was a shover for Luna Freight?"

"Yeah."

"What's this guy's line? Importer?"

"Naw. Got a joint. Bar, gamblin'. Carpet layout. Plush."

"Why you think he'll be interested in grellas?"

"T'feed t'his customers, stupid. He gets a big Veenie play; he's a Veenie himself."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, Name's Jhan fiJhlo."

●

JIGGER came out of the phone booth and shook his head in answer to Walt's look of inquiry. "Jhlo ain't there yet. Be an hour or so before he checks in, they said."

"What ya wanta do? Wait on 'im?"

"I dunno. C'mon." Jigger sauntered out to the street and Walt followed. On the sidewalk, Jigger paused, looking around thoughtfully. "Might as well try one o' these other joints while we're in the Veeniesection."

Walt frowned. "I dunno, Jigger..."

"What can we lose? C'mon, you need some butts, anyhow; ya been bummin' off me all mornin'." He walked briskly toward a sign which proclaimed: *Duan's Genuine Venus Bar and Grill*. Walt trailed him reluctantly.

The cashier was a Venusian girl in Terrestrial clothes. Her green skin and slanted purple eyes added an alien sexiness to her mechanical smile.

"Get your butts, Walt."

Walt named his brand. The girl placed them on the counter.

"We'd like to see the boss, baby."

The girl's hand hesitated briefly over the change she was taking from the register and her eyes flashed at Jigger. She laid two coins before Walt, glanced at Jigger again, then turned

to a wall phone with a deliberate flirt of her hips. She spoke softly in a melodious singsong and waited, listening.

"Wha'd she say?" Walt whispered hoarsely.

"Shaddup."

The girl turned, smiling. "Mr. Duan's office is straight back," she told Jigger.

"Thanks, baby."

●

Duan was a Terrestrialized Venusian in a blue pin-stripe suit. He smiled, shook hands, and inquired briskly, "What can I do for you gentlemen?"

"We'd like to sell you some grellas, Mr. Duan."

"You gentlemen represent an importing house?"

"We're not in the business, Mr. Duan; we just got a few grellas. We'll sell 'em at bargain rates."

"Oh? What do you call bargain rates?"

"Depends on how many you take. Five hundred, say, we'll let you have at fifteen bucks apiece."

Duan smiled. "I use perhaps three, four dozen a week. Five hundred I could not handle."

"Four dozen, then, at seventeen fifty. How does that sound, Mr. Duan?"

"I can inspect these grellas before purchasing, of course?"

"We'll bring 'em here for you. Delivered. Seventeen fifty."

"Why are you offering me such a bargain, gentlemen? Grellas are bringing an average of twenty five dollars on the open market, you know."

"Like I said, we're not in the business. We're not set up to feed the ones we got; we're willin' to take a loss on a quick turnover."

Duan frowned. "Feed them? Your grellas are not dressed?"

Jigger hesitated.

"Naw," Walt said, "they ain't dressed."

Duan rose quickly. "If you'll excuse me a moment, gentlemen..." He opened the door. "I will return immediately..." He was gone.

"C'mon," Jigger said, "let's get outa here."

"Why? What's eatin' you?"

Jigger grabbed Walt's arm and hustled him out to the street. They walked briskly away from, Duan's Genuine Venus Bar and Grill.

"We made a slip," Jigger said harshly. "I didn't wanta tell Duan the grellas was in hiberno, so I made that crack about we couldn't feed 'em. When he found out they wasn't dressed, it musta tipped him off there was somethin' fishy."

"You think he went t'call th' cops?"

"I dunno; but I didn't wanta wait t'find out."

"What's wrong about th' grellas not being dressed?"

"I dunno. Maybe import regulations or somethin'."

"But that's th' way they was shipped in th' pod. Jus' like we got 'em."

"Yeah, yeah. Lemme see if Jhlo's got t'his place yet. We can do business with that bird..."

●

JHAN FIJHLO'S office was Venus conditioned—ninety degrees, ninety percent humidity. The steaming walls were hung with ancient Varnadu swords and gleaming needle guns. A tri-di showed, in slow motion, the savage ambush of early Terrestrial explorers in the misty Venusian jungle.

Jhan fiJhlo himself sat at a massive desk of blood red dorna wood, his green face glistening and inscrutable. His native leathern harness was studded with yellow gems; his twisted breech clout was cloth of gold; and the ruby scabbard of a short sword ca-

ressed his naked thigh. He was an impressive, atavistic figure from a Venus of the past.

Sweating and clammy, Jigger felt as though he had stumbled into a Turkish bath. But he knew the suckers lapped up this kind of corn.

"So these grellas you wish to sell are alive," Jhan fiJhlo said softly.

"Yeah, so they're alive. What's the difference? You can kill 'em, can't you?"

Jhan fiJhlo smiled slowly. "It is against Terrestrial customs regulations to import live grellas; the rules are very stringent."

"Okay, so it's against the law. You ain't got nothin' t'do with that. You don't need t'know how we got 'em past customs. We done business before on other deals like this. All you need t'know is, we got the grellas an' we'll sell 'em cheap. Soon's you get 'em dressed, nobody can tell 'em from any other grellas."

The Venusian laughed musically. "You have a point there, Jigger; yes, you have a point."

"Okay. Is it a deal?"

"I will give you twenty thousand for the lot."

Jigger frowned. "That's less'n ten bucks apiece." He glanced at Walt questioningly.

"We got mos' twenty grand in it ourselves," Walt said. "Make it twenty-five grand."

"Two thousand grellas will require much labor to dress," Jhan fiJhlo mused. "Twenty-two thousand five hundred, perhaps; that is my top offer."

"You gonna pick 'em up yourself in one o' your cargo copters?"

"Yes."

"Okay. It's a deal. Twenty-two fifty."

●

After Jigger and Walt left, Jhan fiJhlo sat at his desk, smiling as he watched the tri-di unreel its familiar story. He watched until the last Terrestrial had fallen before the needle guns and the last head had been severed in ceremonial triumph. Then he laughed, and his laughter was cold. "Perhaps" he mused aloud, "there are jungles, too, on Terra."

●



CAPTAIN WATSON went into the commissioner's office. The mayor was there, and so was another youngish looking man.

"You know the mayor, captain," the commissioner said gravely. "This is Dr. Holt of the Interplanetary Health Service."

Watson acknowledged the introduction and waited.

"As you know, the IPHS maintains a space laboratory in an infra-Mars orbit for experimental bacteriological work too dangerous to be done on the planets. A pod of grellas was shipped from the space lab to IPHS headquarters on Luna for research purposes. The grellas were, of course, carriers of spirus fever. The pod was due last night. It didn't show up. The freight company—Handlan's—reported the pod missing, supposedly meteor struck.

"A corpse was picked up this morning near the outskirts of the city. A girl. Apparently the body was dropped from a copter. The pm revealed spirus fever as the cause of death, she had eaten fried grella approximately an hour before she died.

"It's your baby, captain. Get on it."

"Yes sir."

"Dr. Holt will fill you in. And captain—I don't need to emphasize the seriousness of this matter. The resources of the department are yours. And—don't let it leak to the press."

Holt followed Watson into the corridor. "I'll get the routine started, doctor. Then you can brief me."

"Right."

They entered a large room where several men were working at desks. "Jack," Watson called. A blondish man rose and trailed them to Watson's office.

"Lieutenant Barlow, Dr. Holt. Jack, a woman's body was found a few hours ago. Spirus fever victim. I want an eye dee on the corpse, all the dope you can get on her. And I want it fast. Put some men on it, then get back here; and nothing to the press. Not a word."

"Sure, captain." The door closed behind Barlow.

"Okay, doctor. Shoot."

"How much do you know about spirus fever, captain?"

"Venusian disease."

Holt nodded. "On Venus, two or three animals—among them grellas—are carriers of spirus. Humans get it from eating the flesh of those animals, and from contact with infected humans. I suppose I should say Terrestrials rather than humans; Venusians have a natural immunity to spirus."

"Let me get this straight. You can't get spirus from mere contact with one of the animal carriers; you have to eat its flesh. Like letting a mosquito bite you."

"That's right. But a Terrestrial who has contracted spirus from eating an infected animal can spread the disease to other Terrestrials. Like a cold, for instance. However, that isn't quite as serious as it sounds. Spirus from contact is much less deadly than spirus from eating infected flesh. If you eat an untreated grella, you'll die in one to three hours, and nothing—nothing at all—can save you. However we do have a vaccine which is effective against contagious spirus, and the incubation period for contagious spirus is seven to ten days. So we also have a little time there."

"Then the men who were near the corpse of this girl should be innoculated..."

"My men are taking care of that. We are also having vaccine sent into the city on an emergency basis—enough for the entire county, if necessary."

Watson chuckled grimly. "I hope it won't be necessary. Look here, doctor, aren't you jumping to pessimistic conclusions unnecessarily? Just because a pod of infected grellas is missing and we find one girl who died of spirus, that doesn't mean we face an epidemic, does it? How do you know the two things are even connected? That pod probably did hit a meteor."

"No. That pod was hijacked. And the girl died from eating a grella that was in that pod."

Watson smiled. "I'm not a telepath, doctor; you'll have to explain that line of reasoning."

HOLT NODDED. "Practically all grellas on Venus are carriers of spirus—better than 95% of them. So far, we have been unable to rid living grellas of the virus; the treatment kills them. But we can free dead grellas of spirus, thus rendering them safe for consumption. Grellas won't breed on Earth; they have to be imported. So we permit the export of dead grellas only from Venus. Naturally, all grellas shipped out are treated so there is no danger of spirus. When received on Earth, they are spirus-free and dressed. The only infected grellas which could possibly have reached Earth were in that pod of ours; somebody got that pod."

"And you don't think there might have been a slip somewhere in export-import control?"

"Not a chance. We check at both ends, thoroughly. The import of grellas is rigidly supervized by our men. That's one reason they're so expensive on Earth; on Venus, they're cheaper than the chickens are here."

"Okay. But I still don't see why anyone would hijack a pod of grellas. Cargoes are coming in every hour—from Mars, Venus, Ganymede, the

asteroids—which are worth a hundred times as much as grellas. Why bother with something so relatively valueless?"

Holt shrugged. "I can't answer that, captain. My first guess would be that the hijackers made a mistake. They thought the pod contained something else."

"Or," Watson mused, "they just happened to get hold of the flight curve for this particular pod and took a chance."

Barlow came in and sat down informally. "Girl's name was Maisie Braun. No record. Not much else. I've got a couple boys on it."

Watson frowned. "No address?"

"Nope."

"Okay." Briefly he gave Barlow a run-down of what he knew.

"That pod had to be brought planetside, Jack. Check on unauthorized flights of all cargo burners from the spaceports, any excessive time in space unaccounted for by scheduled operations—that sort of thing. Also check rentals of burners, get a list of freight shovers out on jobs and check with 'em. Forty-eight hours back ought to be far enough. They couldn't pick the pod up more than twelve, fourteen hours ahead of its scheduled arrival.

"Get some planes out mapping the countryside for a radius of a hundred miles. The burner had to land, and there should be blast marks.

"Start some boys on the rounds of all Venusian restaurants. Grellas are a Veenie dish. Some Terrestrials eat 'em, of course, but it's a cultivated taste. If the hijackers are trying to peddle the grellas, they'll go to the Veenie boys. Ask about anyone offering grellas for sale—especially bargain grellas. Check the wholesale outlets and the importers.

"Give Handlan's Freight a fine toothing. Find out everyone who knew the flight curve of this pod. Get the names of their girl friends, anyone else they might have spilled to. If the pod was hijacked the 'jackers had to have inside help. They couldn't match velocities unless they knew the curve data, not in the time they had." Watson glanced at Holt. "Think of anything else, doctor?"

"Bodies," Holt said. "I would advise an immediate check on the cause of death in all cases."

Watson nodded. "And keep on this Maisie Braun; I want to know all about her and quick."

Barlow said, "Sure, captain."

"And remember to keep the press off this; we don't want any panic exodus from the city."

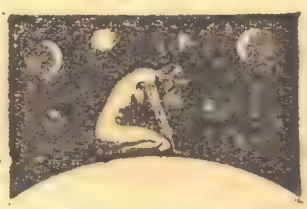
BARLOW hesitated at the door. "Prince acts like he's got wind of something. Had to comb him out of my hair." The door closed.

Watson scowled. "That's bad."

"Prince?" Holt asked.

"Yeah. Interplanetary Press and Video. A sharpie."

Holt grunted.



"Can't you just see it if word gets out? Everybody trying to get away from the plague center. Copter lanes, airports, spaceports, highways jammed... Everybody got to get out, right now. Kill twice as many people as spirus." The captain sighed. "Well, the lines are out; we'll see how the fishing is."

Holt leaned forward. "What do we do now? Just sit here?"

"I don't like that prospect any better than you do, you know, doctor."

"Those grellas are here in the city somewhere. Or nearby. If there were just something we could get our teeth into..."

"There are also ten million people

in this city," Watson said dryly. "Fifteen million nearby."

"Yes, of course."

"No chance the flight curve data leaked from the space lab, is there, doctor?"

"No. We boosted the pod off with our own burner. Sent the curve to Luna on coded beam. They relayed it to Handlan's."

"Umm." Watson's fingers drummed absently on his desk. "You know, doc, there just might be something you and I can do, at that. Besides sit here and enlarge our fannies, I mean." He looked at Holt speculatively. "There's a Veenie who could have a finger in this pie. Bad egg. Like to go have a chat with him."

Holt rose eagerly. "Let's go."

"I'll leave word where I'll be." Watson flipped a switch on the intercom. "This Veenie runs a casino. Operates twelve, fourteen *ranga* tables—licensed under the Regulated Gambling Act, of course. We think the games are crooked, but haven't been able to prove it. Name's Jhan fiJhlo..."

●

Forty five minutes later, Watson and Holt came out of Jhan fiJhlo's. The brisk autumn breeze sweeping through the canyon of the street cut at their sweat soaked bodies with a frigid blade.

"Keeps that office like a hothouse, doesn't he?" Holt remarked.

"Yeah. Worse than hot; humid. Can't stand Venus-conditioning, myself."

"Good way to catch pneumonia, coming out into this wind."

"Yeah. What did you think of that bird?"

"Jhan fiJhlo? Quite a character, isn't he?"

"A real throwback. His father was one of the leaders of the Second Varnadu Rebellion. Family estate was confiscated. Did you notice that tridi?"

"Ambush of the Terrestrial pioneers? Yes."

"Jhlo still thinks that way. Hates our guts. I knew we wouldn't get anything out of him."

"You think he knows something about...this?"

Watson shook his head grimly. "Maybe. Wouldn't bet he doesn t."

"How did he get an Earth visa?"

"Immigration slipped up. Or somebody's palm was greased..."

They returned to the police copter.

"Anything, sergeant?" Watson asked.

"Yes sir. Veenie bar and grill. Couple men trying to sell grellas."

"Let's go."

●

DUAN'S hands worked nervously. "I didn't know, captain. I tried to keep them here until I could call, but they ran out."

"Then you decided not to call."

Duan's eyes shifted. "The men were gone. I wanted no trouble. After all, I had no proof of wrongdoing; only my hunch..."

"Hunch?" Holt snorted. "My God, they admitted the grellas were alive; they wanted to sell them to you, a restaurant owner. You know what eating untreated grella means to a Terrestrial, don't you?"

"Well I was... I was not sure..."

"You knew it would be certain death for a Terrestrial to eat one of those grellas, didn't you?"

Duan was practically in tears. "I am a good citizen, captain, a good Terrestrial. I did not buy the grellas, did I? I have told you about the men, have I not?"

"Sure," Watson grated with weary disgust; "you just didn't want any trouble."

Duan nodded eagerly. "Yes, that is it exactly, captain. I wanted no trouble."

"You come to HQ with me. I want you to look at some pictures, Duan."

"Of course, captain, anything," the Venusian fawned. "I want no trouble..."



JIGGER stomped along the hall of the farmhouse. "Cripes, Walt, I got some expenses in the deal too, ya know. Me an' Toots hadda set the thing up. That took mos' a month; what d'ya think we was livin' on, buttons?"

"Ahhh. Peanuts. You ast me if I want half o' th' proposition fer fifteen grand. I was gonna get th' fifteen back an' we split th' rest. That was th' deal, wasn't it?"

"Sure, after I get back my expenses same as you. I ain't beefin' about givin' you your fifteen goes, am I? I got mos' a grand in it myself. I get that; you get your fifteen; an' we split the rest fifty fifty."

"Sure," Walt sneered, "a lousy seven an' a half grand. An' you shootin' off your mouth about we was gonna get maybe a quarter million, better'n a hundred thou apiece. I never woulda come inta th' thing fer no lousy three, four grand."

"Nobody begged ya, did they? You jumped at the deal."

"Ahhh, nuts."

"Where're the girls? I needa drink."

They pushed into the front room. Toots was sitting in a chair holding a glass in her hand. Two bottles—one empty, the other half full—stood on a table beside her. She was staring dully out the window.

"Make us a drink, huh, Toots," Jigger said.

"We get twenty-two fifty from Jhlo," Walt said loudly. "I get my fifteen, we split th' other seven fifty even. That was th' deal."

"What the hell you tryin' t'do, rob me or somthin'? If it wasn't for me, we couldn'ta pulled the hijack in the first place."

"Yeah. It woulda been better if we hadn'ta pulled it. It was a sucker deal fer a lousy three grand."

"Nuts." Jigger turned to Toots. She hadn't moved. Her knuckles were white on the empty glass. "What's a matter with you? I said fix us a drink, baby."

Toots turned her head slowly. Her face was white and her eyes didn't focus. "Maisie's dead."

"You drunk or somethin'?" Jigger demanded.

"Maisie's dead," Toots repeated blankly.

Walt strode to her and pushed her head back savagely, forcing her to look at him. "What d'ya mean by that crack? Whatcha done to Maisie?"

"She's dead."

Walt slapped her viciously. "Whatcha done to Maisie, ya little tramp?"

Jigger grabbed Walt's shoulder and jerked him back. "That's enougha that."

Walt glared at Jigger, his face red, his breath explosive. Jigger eyed him narrowly for a moment, then turned to Toots. "Okay, baby," he said softly. "Tell us about it."

Mechanically Toots poured whiskey in her glass and downed it. "I been tryin' to get loaded ever since it happened. Mos' a fifth I've drunk an' I don't feel nothin'. Cripes, I might as well a been drinkin' water."

"Maisie," Jiggger said with gentle insistence. "Tell us about Maisie, baby."

"She's dead."

"Yeah, you said that."

"By Gawd," Walt snarled, "if you killed Maisie while I was gone, I'll . . ."

"Shaddup, Walt." Jigger's voice was a knife.

"I didn't kill 'er, Walt; she just died."

"Take it from the first, baby."

"She just ate breakfast, Jigger; honest, that's all she done."

"We all ate breakfast," Walt said harshly, "but the rest of us ain't dead."

"She wanted to see Sunny Day on

the video. We started to town in the copter. I was drivin'. Maisie said she felt kinda hot, like she had a fever or somethin'. I ast her if she wanted I should take her to a doctor. She said no. Then she started talkin' about that rine coat, one like Sunny Day had. Her voice was kinda funny, but I didn't think nothin' much about it. You know how she was always carryin' on about a real rine coat. After a while, her voice jus' trailed off an' stopped. She slumped down in the seat an' her breathin' got heavy. I put the copter on auto an' tried to make her say somethin'. She wouldn't. Then she stopped breathin'."

"You killed 'er," Walt said hoarsely. "You killed 'er."

TOOTS DIDN'T seem to hear him. "We was over to the city by then. I was scared. I went down low over some trees an' pushed her out. I was scared."

"Pushed her out?" Walt screamed. "You pushed Maisie outa th' copter?"

Jigger turned slowly. "Take it easy, Walt."

"I was scared." Toots shivered; "I always been scared of dead ones." She reached for the bottle. "I'm still scared."

Walt backed up two or three steps, his hands working. "You two had this all figgered out, didn'tcha? Get my fifteen grand, then knock me off. Only ya slipped up. That tramp bumped Maisie ahead a schedule an' cooked up a cock n' bull yarn fer me t'swallow." He laughed. "I ain't that stupid, Jigger; I was expectin' somethin' fancy outa you..."

His hand darted under his coat.

In one whirling motion, Jigger grabbed the neck of the empty bottle and threw it. The pellet-gun in Walt's hand spat into the floor as the bottle struck. Glass tinkled in a bright shower. Blindly Walt tried to raise his hands to the red ruin of his face. He didn't make it; he toppled like a cut tree.

Jigger picked up the pellet-gun and stood over him. Calmly he lined the sights on Walt's forehead and pulled the trigger.

"Looka all the blood," Toots said dully. "Why'd ja do that, Jigger? Why'd ja wanta get blood all over?"

Jigger pocketed the gun. "It was him or us, baby. Come on, we got work to do."

Toots ran the tip of her tongue around her lips. "I gotta have a drink, Jigger. I'm scared of dead ones." She shivered. "Gawd, I'm dry..."

●

HOLT SLID from the corner of Captain Watson's desk and stretched. "How about a break, captain? I'm hungry."

Watson pushed his chair back and grinned. "Good idea. Steak house couple doors down the street. Sound all right? I'll phone in our order."

"Told my wife I'd try to make it home for dinner." Holt chuckled humorously. "Like to see her at least once a day if I can. Come with me. I'll call Ellen and she'll have things ready. Won't take much longer than the steak house."

"Sure," Watson said eagerly. "Sounds..." He hesitated, then shook his head slowly. "No, I better not. Too much trouble for your wife; she won't like it."

Holt laughed. "You don't know my wife."

"I know mine; she'd stuff us both in the doghouse." He glanced at his watch. "My lord, it's after ten o'clock. What time do you eat at your house, doc?"

"Whenever I can make it. I'll buzz Ellen."

"You're sure she won't mind?"

"She'll be glad I thought to bring you." Holt reached for the phone.

"My wife's gone to a party. Wanted me to go. Raises hell because I don't keep regular hours." Watson laughed mirthlessly. "How can a cop keep regular hours?"

"Cops and doctors," Holt agreed.

"Yeah. Home-cooked meal will be mighty good." The captain's voice was wistful.

"You'll probably get beans."

●

A sharp faced man accosted them at the landing area on the roof. "What's the latest dope on the big story, captain?"

"Hello, Prince." Watson tried to keep the inner irritation from his voice. "Big story?" He laughed. "Just run of the mill tonight."

"Yeah? Well, thanks anyway, captain." Prince's words were honed with a sardonic edge. He dropped back and watched them enter the copter, a thin smile on his lips.

Holt gave the driver the address. "That's the news sharpie Barlow said was onto something?"

"Yeah. I think he's just shooting in the dark, but you never can tell."

Holt settled back on the seat, watching the busy lights of the teeming city. "How about it, captain?" he asked presently. "Are we close to the missing grellas?"

Watson grunted. "Closer than we were. Let's see what we have so far. We know that Jigger Trask is one of the hijackers—almost got him and that Cardis gal when they were wrecked last year. They were floating around in space for a couple of days, and our ships spotted them—but another hijacker picked them up before we could get there. Then Jigger dumped the Cardis gal and took up with Toots Breck.

"Duan identified Jigger, so we know he's in on this deal; he took a burner out and had plenty of time to get your pod; and his girl friend, Toots Breck, stole the flight curve from the checker at Handlan's. We think the other 'jacker is a smalltime hood named Walt Berg. The dead girl, Maisie Braun, was mixed up with Berg, and Berg can't be located. Maybe there are others in it, too. Can't tell about that yet.

"Apparantly, Duan is the only one these birds have tried to sell the grellas to. I don't believe that, of course; somebody's lying. I've got some boys doublechecking the Veenie restaurants. Especially Jhan fiJhlo."

"You think they've sold the grellas?"

"Maybe. Probably sold some of 'em, at any rate."

The copter landed gently. "What do we do next?" Holt asked, getting out.

Watson shrugged. "Keep trying. Hammer at the Veenie restaurants. Maybe somebody'll remember something. Try to locate Jigger Trask and Walt Berg. Hope..." He paused. "Those aerial photos ought to be ready when we get back. Maybe they'll show something."

"Yeah. Time's running out. If those grellas get scattered..." He let the thought trail away as they entered the house. "We're here, honey," he called cheerfully.

A feminine voice answered, "Dinner'll be ready in a few minutes, dear; there's time for a beer if you'd like."

Holt looked at Watson inquiringly.

"Sure," the captain agreed.

"The living room's over there. Make yourself at home." Holt chuckled. "I'll check to see if we're really having beans."

Watson was watching a tri-di of a boy and a girl playing ball when Holt returned. "Yours, doctor?" He gestured at the children in the tri-di.

"Yes, ours." Holt was carrying two steins and wearing a lugubrious face. "It's beans. Ellen was baking a grella; I threw it out..."

●

WHEN THEY left the copter on the landing roof at headquarters, Prince fell into step with them. "Any more cases of spirus reported yet, Dr. Holt?" he asked casually.

Holt laughed coolly. "I'm afraid you're barking up the wrong tree."

Prince grinned sardonically. "Duan talked."

Watson's big hand grasped the reporter's elbow. "Let's go down to my office, Prince."

"Sure, captain." He laughed irritatingly. "Thought you'd play ball..."

Watson leaned back in his chair, his face grave. "All right, Prince. Speak your piece."

The thin man sucked a cigarette to life leisurely. "The mayor talked to the commissioner; they both talked to you. Dr. Holt here, of the IPHS, has been with you all day. A girl died of spirus. Duan says two men tried to sell him some grellas, live grellas. That adds up to a story, captain." The sharp edge of triumph bit through his voice. "A big story."

Watson shook his head slowly. "You can't break that story, Prince."

"No? It's news, captain, and news is my business."

"And public safety—protection of the public—is mine."

Prince shrugged. "A safe public is a well-informed public. The people deserve the facts, don't they, captain?"

"Yes. Except when the facts can do them harm if exposed prematurely."

"And who, captain, is to decide that delicate question?" Prince asked mockingly.

"In this case, I decide," Watson said softly. "You've got part of the story—enough to do a lot of damage. I'll give you the rest of it, Prince, if you'll give me your word not to break it until I say so."

"Uh unh, captain, no dice. I've got enough now to dig out the rest on my own. I make no promises."

Watson's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "Okay, Prince, I'm going to give you the story. When you know all the facts, I think you'll agree not to air them. Not until I give the go ahead." He rubbed the stubble on his chin. "A pod of infected grellas was hijacked. Probably by mistake. The IPHS was shipping them to Luna lab for experimental purposes. We know who pulled the job—a freight shover named Jigger Trask, fired a couple months ago by Luna Freight for suspected complicity in smalltime smuggling. Couldn't prove enough to jail him. Another punk, Walt Berg, was in on the job.



"Trask and Berg are trying to peddle the grellas. They went to Duan. We're on their tails, and we don't want 'em tipped off; they'd run like rats, and we might not locate the grellas. Not in time.

"You don't need me to paint the picture for you, Prince. You can see the scare banners yourself. *City Infested with Spirus. Incipient Plague Menaces Millions. Infected Grellas Source of Disease.*" Watson shrugged. "There'd be a mass stampede out of town; our communications would break down. Police facilities and manpower would have to be diverted to handle the panicked push. And—we wouldn't find the grellas.

"Think of this, too. Hundreds of restaurants, dozens of imports, have funds tied up in grellas. How many people would eat grella if news of this spirus thing got out before we recovered the infected animals? Do those restaurant men, those importers, deserved to be pushed into bankruptcy because of a couple of numbskull hijackers?"

"You don't want people eating infected grella, do you, captain?"

A vein began to throb in Watson's temple. "Of course I don't. Word has gone out to all the eateries; they're on the lookout for any grellas coming from suspicious sources. But we've got to get those infected animals before they're spread around, possibly shipped to other parts of the country. As long as we can keep this thing localized, we've got a chance to nip it. But once let it get loose..." Watson paused significantly.

"Yeah," Prince said softly. "Spirus ain't nice, is it?"

"It's a killer," Holt said gravely; "one of the worst."

Prince rose. "Well, thanks, captain. Guess I'll be off."

"You'll wait for me to give you the word?"

He smirked. "Afraid I'll have to talk to my editor about that."

The captain's face hardened. "I want your word, Prince."

"Sorry." The reporter turned toward the door.

"I'm sorry too, Prince," Watson said grimly; "you're under arrest."

"You can't do that, Watson; it would ruin you. You know that."

The captain spoke into the intercom. "Send Barlow here."

"This is a clear case of interference with the freedom of the press," Prince said righteously. "My syndicate will raise a stink that will smoke you out of the department."

"Maybe. But it will give me a chance to find those grellas," Watson answered. "The lives I save by doing that are more important than my job. They *are* my job."

Prince laughed. "That's a noble sentiment."

Barlow opened the door.

"Lock Prince up, Jack. Incommunicado."

Barlow frowned, and his lips opened as though to protest the captain's order.

"It's all right," Watson said; "I know what I'm doing."

"Yes sir." The lieutenant put his hand on Prince's arm. Prince smiled secretly as they walked out.

"I'm sorry," Holt said sincerely.

"Yeah, so am I. It was the only thing I could do."

"I'll do everything I can. The IPHS will see to it that the facts are made known."

"Thanks."

"Can he get your job?"

Watson grimaced tiredly. "Maybe. But not until I've located those grellas. Those aerial photos ought to be ready..."



THE STUBBY man with the curly hair placed a finger on the blown up print. "See there, captain? The barn?"

Watson nodded.

"Ever live on a farm, captain?"

Watson frowned at the photo intently. Rocky, gullied hills sloped down to a burned off pasture which was separated from a nearby farmhouse by a tree lined stream. Explosively his hand slapped the desk. "Sure, Feinstein, I see what you mean." He turned to the intercom, his words crackling. "Get riot squad two out to this farm Feinstein spotted. Pronto."

Holt was staring at the photo, his face puzzled. "Why do you think this may be it? There were plenty of other farms with burned pastures, weren't there?"

"Sure, dozens of 'em." Watson's eyes twinkled. "Tell him, Feinstein."

The stubby man smiled shyly. "No roads, doctor. You don't build barns in places where they can only be reached by copter. You can't farm from copters..."

●

Less than an hour later the intercom buzzed. "Squad two reporting, sir."

"Let's have it," Watson grated.

"This was it, sir," the tinny voice stated. "We got Jigger Trask and his girl. Berg is dead; Trask claims he shot him in self defense."

"What about the grellas?"

"The pod is here, all right. Pneumoforms covering it to make it look like a barn. Five hundred grellas left in the pod. Trask says he sold the others to Jhan fiJhlo; I think he's telling the truth."

"When did Jhlo get the grellas?"

"About six hours ago, according to

Trask. Jhlo's men picked 'em up in a cargo copter right after dark."

"Where did they take 'em?"

"Trask seems to think they were going to store 'em at Jhlo's place."

Watson grunted. "Bring Trask and the girl in. Leave some men with the grella pod; Jhlo may come back."

"Yes sir."

Holt grinned. "Looks like the end of the trail, doesn't it?"

The captain shook his head soberly. "I've had men watching Jhlo's casino, his warehouse, and his home. He got those grellas six hours ago. If he's brought 'em in, I should have been notified by now."

Holt's grin faded.

ONCE AGAIN Watson barked at the intercom. "Have Jhan fiJhlo picked up and brought in for questioning. Get a court order for emergency use of hypnoprobe. And I want a condensation of the reports of all men assigned to Jhlo—his place of business, his warehouse, everything. Pronto."

"The men assigned to Jhlo himself called in three minutes ago, captain; Jhlo gave them the slip."

Watson cursed. "Put out a general alert for Jhlo, and get on with the rest of it." He clicked off. "That's bad."

"Where are the grellas?" Holt asked softly.

"Yeah. That's the sixty-four dollar question. A sensible man would dump 'em in the river so he wouldn't get caught with the evidence. But fiJhlo's not a sensible man; he's a fanatic. He's up to something."

"What do you think..."

Before Holt could finish, Lieutenant Barlow burst in. "Something hot, chief." He led a tall Venusian forward. "Fia Tlan has some dope for us."

Watson looked at the Venusian. "You're Fia Tlan?"

"Yes, captain."

"Let's have it."

"Fia Wandu is my cousin, the son of my father's brother. Fia Wandu is also a rookie patrolman?"

Watson nodded.

"I told Fia Wandu about S'en Vlanga. Fia Wandu brought me here."

Again the captain nodded, trying to conceal his impatience.

"I work for S'en Vlanga. Today I am told to go to a strange warehouse; I am given a new job. I hear it whispered that those in this warehouse work for Jhan fiJhlo. I do not like this. I am Terrestrial; Jhan fiJhlo not Terrestrial, not in here." Fia Tlan struck his breast. "Jhan fiJhlo still Varnadu. He hate Terra. In Varnadu, Jhan fiJhlo is noble, *aumen*. I, Fia Tlan, am slave, *fransu*. Here on Terra, Jhan fiJhlo and Fia Tlan are equal. Jhan fiJhlo still fights for the things killed in the Second Rebellion—things better dead forever. I do not work for Jhan fiJhlo."

"What work were you doing?"

"Jhan fiJhlo's men dress and clean grellas. I slip away. Tell Fia Wandu."

"You have done Terra a great service," Watson said gravely.

Fia Tlan bowed proudly.

"Where is the warehouse?"

"Vesta Street. The twelve thousand block."

Watson clicked the intercom. "Squads three and four alert for takeoff. Have Prince brought up; I'm taking him along." He turned to Holt. "This is it. Want to watch the fun?"

Holt smiled. "Try to stop me."

●

The warehouse was grey and dingy in the half light of dawn, and the silent copters slipped over it like bats.

"Think Jhlo's in there?" Holt asked, whispering instinctively.

"We'll soon find out," Watson grunted.

Prince smiled with satisfaction as his ring camera drank in the scene below.

A pair of black police copters went in, barely clearing the roof of the warehouse. Holt felt a shrill, inaudible singing in his bones.

"Ultrasonics?"

Watson nodded.

Another copter moved into position.

Something belched from its belly, tearing a gaping hole in the roof. Thin streamers of whitish vapor began to curl from the hole.

"Hiberno," Watson said. "That should take care of 'em." He raised his voice, calling to the pilot. "Take 'er down."

The ship slanted. Holt fumbled with his gas mask, finally getting it adjusted.

"No one's come out of there," Prince muttered.

"Prowl cars blocking the streets if any of 'em do," Watson growled.

A needle gun tattooed thinly. "One of 'em," Prince said happily; "somebody got him."

Holt spied the form spreadeagled on the street. As he watched, another man emerged from the warehouse staggering blindly, his hands raised.

"Sonics missed some of 'em," Watson said disgustedly.

The copter touched.

"You two stay here," Watson snapped. "I'll signal when it's safe." He dropped to the ground and ran, crouching, toward the warehouse.

Other shapes in blue drifted forward like the shadows which had recently concealed them. In a moment the warehouse doors swung wide, streaking the gloom of the street with yellow.

THE SHUTTER of Prince's ring camera continued to whirr almost inaudibly. Somewhat self consciously Holt removed his gas mask. He stared at the reporter's intent profile for a moment, then said, "Prince, can you forget that business in Watson's office?"

"Worried about the captain's scalp, doc?" His voice was dry with amusement.

"He's a good egg. And a good cop."

Prince laughed softly. "Sure."

Holt's jaw hardened. "The IPHS *tries* not to play favorites among the news syndicates," he said significantly.

"You think I'm a snake of the first water, don't you, doc?"

Holt remained silent.

"Forget it," Prince said quietly. "I planned that business. I knew this thing was about to break, and I wanted in on the kill. I made Watson sore so he'd arrest me, figuring he'd bring me along for the wind-up."

"Oh," Holt said weakly.

"Yeah. Don't worry about the captain; I know he's a good cop." He chuckled. "And I'm a good reporter."

A figure came to the door of the warehouse and beckoned toward the copter.

"Speak of the devil," Prince said lightly. "Let's go, doc." He scrambled from the copter and raced away.

Holt struggled with his gas mask, cursing silently. By the time he got it on, Prince was darting into the warehouse.

Watson was waiting for Holt at the door. "This is it."

"The grellas?"

"Yeah."

"Jhan fiJhlo?"

"Not yet."

The warehouse was long and dimly-lighted, piled high with wooden boxes stamped, *Made on Venus*. Several green bodies were sprawled on the floor, and smoky tendrils of hiberno made the place seem cut from a murky dream. Blue-clad figures scurried about in methodical confusion, indistinct shapes melting into the fog.

"Where did that damn reporter get to?" Watson growled. He started off along an aisle sheared through the piled boxes, and Holt followed. "Told him to stay with me; we haven't covered all of this place yet."

Visibility grew worse as they hurried along the narrow tunnel. Holt worked his tongue around his mouth, trying to dispel the medicinal taste of the mask. Unreasonably, he wanted a cigarette.

The corridor swerved sharply. As they rounded the turn, Holt got a glimpse of a partially-closed door outlined by spilling light. Watson caught his arm roughly, dragging him back.

"Stay here," he said softly. He

peered around the bend, then tiptoed out of sight.

HOLT WAITED a few seconds, then edged forward after the captain. Watson's figure was a dark blur against the bright rectangle ahead. Holt thought the door had opened a bit since he had first glimpsed it, but he couldn't be sure. Tensely he watched.

Watson reached the door and swung it wide. A gun was silhouetted in his hand. Prince was in the room beyond, bending over a desk; behind the reporter stood a tall figure, sleeve sword gleaming dully in upraised hand.

The tableau lasted but an instant. Before the involuntary shout of warning could escape Holt's lips, Watson's gun spat and the tall figure collapsed.

Prince whirled as Holt ran forward.

"Thought I told you to stick with me," Watson said bitingly.

"Take a look at this." Prince gestured at the desk. "Incendiary hookup, unless I miss my guess."

Watson bent over the desk.

Holt knelt beside the Venusian on the floor. The man was dead, a neat hole in the back of his skull. His face was covered by a gas mask, and he wore a tight fitting metallic cap on his head. Holt stripped off the mask. He had never seen the fellow before.

"Incendiary wiring, all right," Watson said. "Jury-rigged."

"You and your boys would be fricassee by now if I'd stuck with you," Prince remarked sardonically.

"And you'd be toasting your tootsies in hell if I hadn't tailed you," Watson retorted. "Dumb luck."

"Nuts."

Two cops hurried through the door. "Saw you head this way, captain," one of them said. "We hadn't got around to this part yet, so..."

"I see you hadn't," Watson interrupted sarcastically. "Pull the teeth of this setup." He gestured toward the desk.

"Thought he might be Jhan fiJhlo," Holt said, waving at the dead Venusian

"Small fry," Watson grunted; "you and Prince come with me. Want to show you something."

THE RECKONING

A Report on the November issue—

Two stories, those by Temple and St. Clair received no complaints, this time; Henderson and Wellman both drew catcalls — but just as many other readers listed these stories in first place. Here's the complete listing.

1.	**Experiment in Genius - Temple**	**2.15**
2.	**Voices in the Void - Lesser**	**2.50**
3.	**A Secondary First - Henderson**	**3.07**
4.	**The Way Back - St. Clair**	**3.15**
5.	**Ismail, the Outworlder - Wellman**	**3.23**

A word to the wise: if you want your votes counted, better get that preference page or letter, or postcard, in to us by the end of January. The polls close early in February, when the issue will be closed.

The grellas were in a corner of the warehouse. At one end of a long table a few of the animals still slumbered in the original plastic bubbles. On the table, others were in various stages of being cleaned. At the far end, neat packages were stacked. Watson broke one of the packages open. Inside was a dressed grella, packed in dry ice. The captain extracted a card from the box and passed it to Prince. Over his shoulder Holt read: *Compliments of the Interplanetary Union.*

"Look at the addresses on these crates," Watson said.

Prince whistled. "Congressmen, judges, senators... Jhlo was going to send the grellas to these people?"

"Yeah. Probably planning to mail 'em so they'd all arrive at the same time. And a lot of them would have eaten the things. 'Compliments of the Interplanetary Union.'" Watson snorted. "Compliments of a vengeful Varnadu."

"Sure," Prince exclaimed. "That's it. Revenge. Varnadu's Vengeance on Terrestrial Conquerors."

"I'd go easy on the scareheads," Watson said judiciously. "Jhlo's a crackpot, all right. And a dangerous one. But there aren't many of his kind left."

Prince glanced at his watch. "See you around, captain," he said hurriedly. "Gotta catch a deadline." He trotted away.

Watson and Holt ambled toward the street. "Any word on Jhlo?"

Watson shook his head. "Not yet. We got the grellas; that's the important thing. We'll get Jhlo."

"Yeah. I'll make arrangements about the grellas."

"Okay."

The sun was ruby on the rooftops outside, and Holt removed his mask gratefully.

Watson yawned. "My wife ought to be home from the party by now. Think I'll catch some shuteye."

"Good idea. I'll see you later, captain."

Watson nodded.

Holt stood in the street watching the policeman plod toward the copter. Wason's shoulders sagged a bit with weariness, and his shadow was long on the pavement; he moved like a man who was cold and alone.

The doctor shook his head pityingly. "Must be hell to have a wife like his," he muttered. Thoughtfully he lighted a cigarette, then turned to go home to Ellen.

●

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF

Future Science Fiction Stories, published bimonthly at Holyoke, Mass. for October 1, 1951.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Louis H. Silberklelt, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y.; Editor, Robert W. Lowndes, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y.; Managing editor, Robert W. Lowndes, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y.; Business manager, Maurice Coyne, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y.

2. The owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual member, must be given.) Columbia Publications, Inc., 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y.; Louis H. Silberklelt, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y.; Maurice Coyne, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y.; Harold Hammond, 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y.

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5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only.)

LOUIS H. SILBERKLEIT
(Signature of Publisher)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 24th day of September, 1951. Maurice Coyne (My commission expires March 30, 1952). (SEAL)

THE TINKERER

By S. A. Lombino



The mutant was fiddling with the dials as Bonny stepped in.

"*ORION EIGHT* to Earth Home," the speaker blared. "*Orion Eight* to Earth Home, come in."

"This is Earth Home," Mallon said. "Come in, *Orion Eight*."

"That you, Art?"

"Welcome home, Pete," Mallon said into the microphone. His face cracked into a large smile. "Have a nice trip?"

"Very sweet," the speaker crackled. "Very sweet, indeed; remind me to

Someone was causing these shipwrecks — someone who had died and been forgotten centuries before!

The "Time-Travel" story in science-fiction does not accord with relativistic theories from which we not only derive our present "knowledge" of the cosmos, but through the manipulation of which our most advanced technology ensues. However, these stories make for good reading, when well done, and the theory may not be entirely correct. That is, the relativistic theories may be accurate enough in detail to be "workable" in some respects, but incorrect in various limitations assumed from them, etc. Of course, when one admits time-travel, various verbal paradoxes are inescapable —but does it matter? We think not.

tell you about the Martian ladies sometime."

"I know all about them," Mallon said, grinning into the mike.

There was a soft chuckle from the other end. "In that case, sweetheart, give me landing instructions, will you?"

"Everything shipshape?"

"As wholesome as a full moon."

"Take Berth Seven, Pete," Mallon said; "I'll flash the lights down here."

"Roger," Pete acknowledged. Mallon switched off the transmitter and pressed another button on the panel. He lifted a handmike and said, "Seven?"

"Here, sir."

"*Orion Eight* is coming in; give him some lights, will you?"

"Yes, sir." Mallon clicked off the handmike as a splash of lights flooded the spaceport on the farthest end of the field. Again, he pressed a button on the panel. "Earth Home to *Orion Eight*, over."

"Here I am, Art."

"Are you getting the lights?"

"Oh muchly! Thank you, kind sir. Brew me a pot of coff..."

Mallon blinked at the speaker and then adjusted a dial on the panel. "Pete?"

A sound something like a cough sputtered into the control tower.

"Pete?" Mallon called. "Are you all right, Pete?"

When Pete's voice came again, it was strained and tight.

"Gawd, Art. Gawd, I..."

The room was filled with the crackle of static. Mallon was instantly alert; his finger pressed a red button and a terrible clanging filled the spaceport. He swivelled out of his seat and headed for the p l a s t e e l door, started down the ladder, and leaped to the sand when he was halfway down. Already, he could see the emergency land cars scooting across the sand. His eyes searched the sky.

All he saw at first was the yellow-red of the exhaust blazing across the blackness.

A blue-coated figure hurried up beside him. "Trouble, sir?"

"Get some lights on," Mallon snapped. "On the double."

The figure vanished, and Mallon listened to the whine of jets overhead, his lower lip clamped firmly between his teeth. Lights blinked into the sky, man-made suns brightening the darkness with inquisitive, probing rays.

THE *ORION EIGHT* gleamed like a silver slug far up in the sky; then, like an emergency flare at the peak of its arc, it hung in the air for a terrible moment and plummeted downwards. Lights, radar-controlled, f o l l o w e d it all the way. The air screamed like a banshee and the silver speck grew larger and larger, until Mallon could almost make out the lettering on its port side.

Then it thundered into the sand, splintering, crumbling, bursting, the exhaust blazing upward like a weird funeral pyre.

Land cars darted around the twisted, tangled wreckage like black beetles. An ominous grumbling began within the crippled ship.

Mallon raised both hands over his head and drew them backward. The tower picked up his signal, and a voice boomed from every speaker on the field.

"Clear the wreckage! Clear the wreckage immediately!"

The land cars scooted frantically, big beetles caught in the glare of the rockets. The grumbling reached a peak; the beetles scurried away in panic. Then the explosion rocked the field, and Mallon threw himself face downward in the sand, his hands covering the back of his head.

●

REPORTERS swarmed into his office again. Mallon sat behind the desk, his fingers clenched tightly in his lap, out of view. A week since the crash, and still they came in droves.

"Is it true, Commander Mallon, that the pilot of that ship was a friend of yours?"

Mallon stared at the white-faced youth who'd asked the question. His eyes held the reporter's for a moment, and then he said, "Yes. It's true."

"His name?"

"I don't see the importance..."

"We can get it anyway," a reporter reminded him.

"Pete. Peter Slade."

"And how long did you know him?"

"Five years."

Pencils scribbled busily. They all looked the same—little white men in red and gold breeches and tunics.

"Do you think there's any connection between this crash and the previous five?" a voice asked.

"I don't know," Mallon said.

"But do you think there's a possibility of a connection?"

"Anything is possible."

The reporters smiled. "But do you think a connection is likely?"

"I said I didn't know."

"Isn't it your job to know?" one of the reporters asked. They seemed to smirk in unison, bland smiles etched across their pasty white faces.

"In five seconds," Mallon said, his fist clenched beneath the desk, "I'm going to kick the whole stinking lot of you the hell out of here."

"You wouldn't want us to print that, would you?" a voice piped.

"You can print whatever the hell you damn..."

Her voice came into the room like a fresh breeze through a stagnant graveyard. "Excuse me, Commander," she said.

Pencils stopped scribbling, and the white faces looked up, searching for the source of the sound.

Good old Bonny, Mallon thought. *Good old Bonny.*

She stood in the doorway, her blonde hair whipped to one side of her head, lashed over her right shoulder, catching the sunlight that streamed through the window. She wore blue, and her tunic swelled over her breasts, tanned and firm where the tunic ended. She smiled at the reporters and turned to Mallon again. "I hate to disturb you, sir, but your appointment with the Admiral; you haven't forgotten?"

Mallon snapped his fingers, pushed his chair away from the desk and said, "Golly, I almost did. Thanks, Miss Porter."

"I'm sorry, gentlemen," she said, shooing them toward the door; "top priority, you know."

He watched the sway of her hips as she herded them out, watched the ripple of muscles along the exposed part of her back. When she'd closed the door, he let out a deep breath and said, "Thanks, Bonny."

"Vultures," she said, her lips crim-

son, pulled back over startlingly white teeth.

He slammed his fist down on the desk. "There is a connection, Bonny. Dammit, there is a connection! I know there is. Six ships in a month. They couldn't all be accidents."

"But what?" she said. "What's the cause?"

"If I only knew," Mallon said.

•

THAT WEEK, the *Star Queen* crashed. She was coming in from Venus, a passenger ship loaded with the wives and children of the men who'd spent the past three years there. Mallon studied the reports of the wreckage carefully. From what the crewmen could gather, the ship had been in perfect order until it hit the ground. Nothing could be told about the occupants. Each had been burned to a powdery crisp.

"What else have we got?" he asked Bonny.

"Nothing, really," she said; "these are the reports we've been getting."

He studied them intently. Ever since the crash of *Orion Eight,* he'd had a twenty-four hour detector watch posted. He looked over these reports now. No electronic beam detected at time of crash of *Star Queen;* no sound beam detected at time of crash of *Star Queen.* A geiger counter had registered a slight disturbance several miles from the spaceport, but upon investigation, it turned out to be a minor explosion in one of the storage dumps. A twenty-four hour vigilance was still being maintained.

"Nuts," he said. "Nothing; not a damned thing here."

"What does it all mean?" Bonny wondered.

"I'm not sure yet," Mallon said. "One thing seems certain: it wasn't any mechanical failing of the ships that caused the crashes."

"What was it then?"

"I imagine it was something that affected the pilot in some way—perhaps affected every passenger on the ship. I can't really tell, yet."

"What are you going to do?" She had taken the reports from his desk and placed them in the filomatic. She watched them as they spinned crazily into their proper order.

"I don't like to do it, but I'm adding a time-probe to the twenty-four hour vigilance."

She didn't answer.

"Something is affecting the people on these ships. So far, we've been able to register nothing on our detectors. This can mean only one of two things: Either the detectors aren't capable of doing their jobs—which I strongly doubt—or else this something is coming from another time-span. Either way, a time-probe can't harm us any."

"I thought the time-probe was..."

"Unlawful? Yes, but this is an emergency; the military can use it if an emergency exists."

He paused and plucked a lighted cigarette from the container on his desk. "Somebody, or something, is killing an awful lot of people. I'm going to find out who or what it is if I have to go as far back as the twentieth century."

"Suppose it's somewhere in the future."

"Then I'll find it; and when I do, I'll pluck it out by its rotten roots."

"Shall I type the order?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. He had risen, and he stood now with his back to the window, the endless sand stretching away behind him. "Yes, type the order."

•

THE CRASHES stopped suddenly. It was almost as though the time-probe had frightened whatever had been causing the crashes into submission.

Mallon was happy to a certain extent, but he knew that he couldn't

keep the time-probe going indefinitely. While an emergency existed, he was perfectly within his rights to use the mechanism; but three months without a single crash could hardly be considered an emergency.

As he suspected and dreaded, the order came down the chain of command soon enough.

Admiral Davis to Commander Mallon: Spaceoport 9X-1113. Effective 24 June X Cease use time-probe re Earthlaw 347 Statute 12 X Emergency Officially Ended 22 June X Acknowledge X.

His reply went back within the hour.

Commander Mallon to Admiral Davis: Spaceoprep 33-5-61. Spaceopord 9X-1113 received and acknowledged herewith X Time-probe discontinued 1500 hours 24 June X Awaiting further emergency X.

"Think it's wise to send that?" Bonny asked.

"What the hell," Mallon replied; "do they think this is going to be the end? That cookie we're dealing with is a smart one. He knows, somehow, that we can't operate the probe unless an emergency exists, so he's conveniently stopped the emergency. It sounds like a silly law to me, anyway; why on earth can't we use the probe without an emergency existing?"

"Why on Mars even," Bonny kidded.

Mallon was grim when he turned to face her. "I wish I could joke about it, Bonny. The trouble is, I'm too scared to joke; you see, I think I know what's going to happen now."

"I'm sorry, Art," she said.

"We'll see," Mallon reflected. "Maybe I'm wrong; I hope to heaven I am."

●

THREE DAYS after the probe was discontinued, the lunar mail ship *Scope* crashed thirty seconds after blastoff. It had no sooner left the ground, roaring up out of Berth Four than it seemed to plummet Earthward again, tangling itself into the sand, blazing white against the morning sky.

Mallon protested to the Admiral.

"A coincidence," the Admiral said; "surely you can't consider this anything conclusive?"

"I do, sir," Mallon replied. "I definitely do consider it conclusive."

"That's not a very scientific observation for an Officer in Space Operations," the Admiral said drily.

"Perhaps not," Mallon admitted. "It seems obvious to me, though, that the crashes ended as soon as the time-probe started."

"That doesn't mean a..."

"And they started again the moment the time-probe ended," Mallon interrupted.

"And you conclude from this scanty evidence that someone purposely stopped operations when the time-probe went into action? Nonsense!"

"I'd like permission to start the time-probe again, sir," Mallon said bluntly.

"Permission denied," the Admiral answered.

"I'll ask once more, sir; I'd like permission..."

"Permission denied," the Admiral snapped. "Need I make the point clearer?"

"No, sir," Mallon said. "Thank you, sir."

He saluted and turned on his heel.

"Mallon," the Admiral called.

Mallon turned. "Sir?"

The Admiral shook his head. "Nothing; nothing at all. Dismissed."

Mallon walked out of the room, a plan already taking shape in his mind. Was it worth it, he asked himself? Almost instantly, he decided it was; he couldn't stand by and see people killed because of the stupidity of a superior officer. The man was an absolute idiot! Anyone with the intelligence of a flea could see the impor-

tance of a continued time-vigilance. Well, he'd see that the probe went on, with or without permission. He'd need help, but not much.

Bonny. He had to tell Bonny.

He quickened his step, crossing the large field to his own quarters. He threw open the door and slammed it shut behind him. Bonny jumped to her feet, anticipation lighting her green eyes. "Well?" she asked.

"That pig-headed mule," Mallon stormed. "He refused permission; he thinks it's coincidence. Coincidence, mind you!"

Bonny collapsed onto a pneumatic couch along the wall. "What now?" she asked.

"Will you help me?"

She looked at him thoughtfully for a second. "Of course; you know that."

"I mean, no matter what I intend doing?"

She didn't hesitate this time. "Yes," she answered.

"Good. Here's my plan..."

●

THE TIME-PROBE was housed in a plasteel building at the far end of the field. There was one entrance to the building, and the windows were mere slits in the wall, horizontal, parallel to the ground. They looked very much like gun-slits. Mallon lurked in the shadows and motioned to Bonny.

She drew close to him, and he could hear her breathing in the darkness. "Are you sure you want to go through with this?" he asked.

"Yes," she whispered; "I'm sure."

Her eyes were pinpointed by a full moon overhead. Abruptly, he swept her into his arms, his lips firm on hers, his arms drawing her closer. She buried her head in his chest and whispered, "It is the right thing, Art, isn't it?"

"Yes," he said, "I'm sure it is."

She moved away from him, her hands lingering on his arms. Then she smiled and said, "Let's go, then; I'm as ready now as I'll ever be."

"Good girl," he said. "You know what to do?"

"Yes."

"Good luck, darling."

She moved out of the shadow of the building and walked to the door. Cautiously, she knocked once.

Mallon waited, the sound of his heart thundering in his ears. There was no sign of movement inside the building. Again, Bonny knocked on the door.

"Who goes there?" a voice sounded from within.

"Open the door," Bonny called, her voice clear on the night air.

The door opened a crack and Mallon could determine a pair of straining eyes peering into the darkness. "Hello," Bonny said, her voice warm and alluring.

"What is it?" the guard asked.

"I'm lost," she said simply; "I was supposed to board the Venus rocket at 2100, but I can't find Berth Six."

She sounded utterly helpless, utterly the confused woman. Mallon couldn't help smiling in the darkness.

"You're a long way from Berth Six, sister," the guard said.

"Am I?" again in the helpless, lost voice.

The guard began to warm up. "Sure. Berth Six is way over on the other end of the field." He made an amibiguous gesture with his head.

"Would you show me?" Bonny asked.

"I can't leave here, sister," the guard replied.

"Can't you even step out of that horrible building and show me the right direction?" she coaxed.

The door opened wide and the guard stepped into the moonlight for a moment.

A MOMENT was all Mallon needed. He struck swiftly and silently, his hands clenched over his head

and then crashing down on the base of the guard's skull. The guard toppled forward, his finger still pointing off into the distance toward Berth Six.

"Come on," Mallon whispered urgently. Bonny followed him into the structure. Quickly, he bolted the door and leaned against it. "Done," he said.

"And what happens when they find out?" Bonny asked.

"They'll have to blast me out of here, Bonny—and that would mean the end of the probe. I'm afraid we've got them right where we want them. Now, let's get to work."

They moved through the small building swiftly, until Mallon found the machine. It sat large and squat in the corner of the room, its face a maze of dials and switches. Off to the side of the machine, and covering most of the wall there, a large screen stood. The screen was divided into little squares where horizontal and vertical hairlines crossed. The screen was dark, like a giant black window plastered onto the wall, a window through which no light shone.

"Video, no less," Bonny remarked.

"That's the screen," Mallon explained. "When you find what you're looking for, all you have to do is focus it and you'll get it on the screen."

"And then what?"

"Well, it's not exactly like video, at least, I've never seen anyone step through a video screen."

"You mean you can step through that thing."

"It's like a bridge," Mallon explained. "The 'present' is on this side of the screen, and the 'past' and the 'future' are on the other side; all you have to do is step through."

"I can see why they're against using this thing," Bonny exclaimed.

"It can be dangerous, I suppose," he admitted.

He studied the dials for a moment. "Everything seems to be all right," he said. "We'll start her up in a minute. Only this time our little playmate isn't going to know what we're up to."

He crossed to another machine and threw the switch. A loud hum filled the room. "Give her a little while to warm up," Mallon said.

"Is that the junior edition of this one?" Bonny asked, looking at the machine.

"It's a jammer," Mallon said, "much like the jamming gear they used on radar years ago. All it does is jam the other guy's gear, cloud his screen, make it impossible for him to receive."

"In other words, we can see what our friend is doing and he won't know we're watching?"

"That's about it, Bonny."

He crossed to the jamming gear and listened to its hum. "Now. Suppose we start from twenty-eight and work our way back. Chances are anyone farther back than the twenty-third wouldn't have access to time-control anyway."

HE TURNED a knob on the jamming gear swiftly, until the figure twenty-eight was directly under a white marker above the knob. "There," he said. His fingers moved to a horizontal bar above the knob, and he moved a sliding weight to the figure ninety. "That'll put us in the 2890's. Anyone operating any sort of a time-mechanism back there is going to have a hell of a time with his results."

He flicked a switch, closing the circuit. There was a slight increase in the humming when the switch was closed. Other than that, everything seemed the same.

"Now comes the hard part," he said. "You can't cover a general time or place with the big baby. It's a long tedious process, unless we're lucky."

He threw the switch on the time-probe, and a louder humming filled the room, drowning out the tinier hum of the jamming gear. Quickly, he began setting dials. He set the century, and then the decade. He twisted another dial to the month, still another to the week, and another to the day.

"My Lord," Bonny exclaimed. "We can be here for centuries."

"Not quite," Mallon said, smiling. "It actually takes less than a few seconds to scan any particular area during a particular time. In ten minutes, we can cover ten years in time in an area covering thousands of miles; in a half hour, we'll have scanned the entire earth as far back as half a century."

"Thank the Lord," Bonny said. She lighted a cigarette and slumped into a chair.

"We're about ready," Mallon said. "Would you turn the knob under that screen."

She reached out lazily, and Mallon added, "On the far left, Bonny; all the way over."

She turned the knob until it clicked. The screen seemed to waver for a moment and then flashed into brilliance. Mallon sat at the time-probe, and adjusted a pair of earphones to his head. "Here we go, baby."

His hands moved busily over the machine and the screen suddenly began to waver again. And then, like a magic scene unfolding before their eyes, a strange city swam into view.

"Sunday, December thirty-first, 2899," Mallon said. "The city is..."

A speaker suddenly burst into sound on the wall of the room. *"All right, Mallon, this is the Admiral; turn that machine off."*

Bonny leaped to her feet. Mallon remained at the probe, his fingers busy with the dials.

"Art," she said, "what are we going to do? The guard probably reported..."

"Sit tight," Mallon said. "I'm switching to Paris," he added with enthusiasm.

"Do you hear me, Mallon?" the speaker demanded. *"This is the Admiral calling."*

MALLON took the headphones off and beckoned to Bonny. "Just sit here," he said, "and twist this dial slowly. Keep your eyes on the screen. This other dial controls the focus. You can get closer to your subject by snapping this switch. You're not looking for a person, remember; if you hit a time when anyone else is operating a probe, your screen will grow dimmer. Then you can really begin searching in..."

"Answer me at once, Mallon," the speaker warned.

"I can't," Bonny complained. "I mean, I couldn't, Art. All those dials and knobs and switches. I can't even wind my own wrist chron without..."

"Oh hell," Mallon said. "Click off the screen, will you?"

She turned the knob under the screen and Mallon turned off the probe. He walked to the intercom and picked up a handmike. "Mallon here," he said.

"Mallon?" the Admiral barked.

"Yes, sir?"

"I'm glad you were sensible about this, Mallon; you were foolish to turn on the probe in the first place."

"I'm going to turn it on again as soon as you tell me what you want, sir."

"What!" the Admiral screamed.

"Yes, sir."

"You idiot," the Admiral said. "How far do you think you can go? Do you realize this is mutiny? I distinctly denied permission to use the probe. Damn it, Mallon, I'll have you blasted out of there with hydrobombs if I have to."

"And ruin a ten-million dollar piece of equipment?" Mallon answered; "you're kidding me, sir."

"I command you to leave that building immediately. And take that girl with you."

"What was that, sir?"

"Leave that building at once!"

"I'm sorry, sir, there must be something wrong with my receiver. I can't hear a word you're saying."

"Look here, Mallon..."

"I'll have to sign off, sir."

He flipped off the transmitter and made sure all the receivers were turned

all the way down. He could still hear the Admiral squawking in the background, but with the volume down it sounded like excited whispering.

"Was that wise?" Bonny asked.

"Who cares? Let's get back to work."

●

THEY WORKED. They worked for hours, time-space spinning before their eyes. Bonny watched the screen in fascination, the panorama of history swimming before her eyes. Cities, countries, now in the splendor of perfection, now in the dismal dust of ruins. It was dazzling, and a little frightening.

But the screen remained clear and bright, never once dimming.

"Maybe the old boy was right," Mallon said at last.

Bonny kept her eyes glued to the screen.

"Maybe it was coincidence," he went on. "Maybe all those crashes were just..."

"Art!"

Mallon looked up.

"The screen! It's dimmer. Art, it's dimmer."

He locked the time-probe and raced to the screen, hastily checking the brilliancy meter. "You're right, Bonny," he shouted, sweeping her into his arms. "You're right."

He released her almost immediately and went back to the probe again. He leaned over the knobs and began a new search, trying to pinpoint the source of the dimness on the screen.

Bonny watched the screen in fascination. It was almost as though a movie camera were panning in for a closeup. Buidlings came nearer; faces were visible—strange faces, stranger architecture. And then walls faded and the screen illuminated a room and a man bent over the controls of a small box-like instrument.

The man was brawny, wide shouldered, his tremendous bulk filling the chair he sat in. He was bald, his head gleaming in the light of the room. There was an intent concentration in his eyes and his brows were knitted together as in deep thought. His ears were large, pointed at the top. His face was like granite.

He wore a red uniform, and there was a row of campaign ribbons across his chest.

"His head," Bonny said in surprise. "He's got...antennae." She paused and looked at Mallon. "They are antennae, aren't they?"

"Yes," Mallon said, striving to get a clearer focus. "A hangover from the twenty-second century, the Age of Darkness. Eyes weren't much use then. Man adapted, developed long feelers on his forehead. You'll notice that his are rather short. I imagine they're just ornaments now, serving no real use."

"What now?" Bonny asked. "Is he the one?"

"I don't know, but we'll soon find out."

He pressed a button on the probe. "I'm locking the screen. There's a force-field across it now that he won't be able to cross; we can talk to him as soon as I cut off the jamming gear."

Bonny gasped. "Talk to him?"

Mallon was already across the room. He smiled as the Admiral began his tirade again. Quickly, he cut off the jamming gear.

COMMUNICADO

An absorbing speculation, a borderline article between fact and fiction

By Katherine MacLean

is but one of the many features in the February

SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

THE MAN in the red uniform looked up from his box-like instrument and stared into the screen. "Hello," Mallon said cheerily.

The man's voice was gruff. "Hello," he said, with some surprise.

"Having fun with that box?" Mallon asked. He pointed to the instrument on the table. It had a large knob on the left side and what looked like an ancient, miniature radar antennae jutting from the top.

The man smiled, a silly open smile.

A shiver ran up Mallon's spine. He'd seen that smile before; he'd seen it at the Institution on Mars. He'd seen those eyes, too, the empty, unintelligent eyes.

He was looking into the eyes of an idiot.

"Fun?" the man asked.

Bonny sensed it immediately; she touched Mallon's arm, and his hand closed over hers.

"Yes," Mallon said, "with your little box there."

The man smiled again. His large hand reached out to touch the box. "Yes," he said. "Fun. The box makes crashes; I watch them."

He grinned again, foolishly.

"You've got to throw that box away," Mallon said.

"No," the man protested.

The speaker on the wall suddenly burst into life again.

"All right, Mallon, hear this. Surprised, aren't you? I've had the volume of your speakers turned up by remote control. I've got the building surrounded, and I'm going to start blasting away in three minutes. Come out before then, and you'll be all right."

"Go to hell," Mallon said. He kept his eyes glued to the man in the red uniform.

"You've got to give me that box," Mallon said to him.

"No," the man insisted, standing before the box. "The box makes the men scream. They grab their heads. Then I watch the crash. The crash is pretty; you'll see."

He sat down at the table, his back to the screen, apparently oblivious of Bonny and Mallon. He was concentrating again, twisting the knob on the side of the box.

Mallon slipped a pair of gloves onto his hands. He yanked several steel-pointed darts from the belt around his waist. Quickly, he adjusted the meter on the gloves, loading the fingers with the lethal darts. He ran to the probe and pushed a button marked *Release.*

"What are you doing?" Bonny said.

"I've taken the force field off. I'm going through; I'm going to kill him."

"All right, Mallon," the speaker bellowed, *"here it comes."*

EVEN THROUGH the thick walls of the building, Mallon heard the swish of the projectile guns. The side of the building seemed to buckle inward, and a swiftly moving pellet sped through the room and crashed into the far wall.

"Had enough, Mallon?" the speaker asked.

Mallon stepped closer to the screen. "If there's any trouble..." he started to say. He turned swiftly at the warning hiss of another gun going off. The wall ripped open again and the pellet sang through the air.

It slammed into his shoulder, spinning him around, smashing him against the jamming gear. He crumpled to the floor, clutching his shoulders, his face writhed in pain.

In the screen, the man leaned over the little box, his eyes gleaming.

"He's...just...tinkering," Mallon said. "He doesn't know he's destroying...brain waves. He doesn't know he's... spanning time... but he's dangerous...dang..."

Bonny dropped to her knees and whipped the glove from Mallon's right hand. He watched her in a faded mist, the pain in his shoulder throbbing violently. She put the glove on her own hand and stepped to the screen.

Another wall buckled inward and a larger projectile sped into the room, imbedding itself in the wall over the time-probe. Mallon watched her step

behind the man at the box, the tinkerer who was killing people, the idiot who had stumbled on the scientific achievements of a civilization now dead.

Suppose, Mallon thought, *suppose one of those projectiles hits the probe? Suppose...suppose...*

The last thing he saw was the dart speeding from Bonny's gloved hand. There was an expectant look on her face, a strange look almost bordering on a smile.

The man at the box collapsed, and Mallon collapsed with him, the pain in his shoulder covering him with a drowsy blackness.

●

"YOU'LL be promoted, of course," the Admiral was saying.

Mallon nodded vaguely and clutched Bonny's hand. His shoulder was strapped now, but the pain was still there.

"Ingenious deduction," the Admiral went on.

"Guesswork," Mallon said feebly. "There had to be a reason for the law against using the time-probe; that law was made a long time ago—a long, long time ago."

"There's a reason for all laws, Mallon," the Admiral said, nodding his head pompously.

Mallon smiled and squeezed Bonny's hand. Later, he would tell her that the law had probably been passed shortly after the tinkerer's body was discovered. Someone wise enough to realize that he was playing with the future would see to that. What that someone would never know was that a person from the future had gone back into the past to end the threat.

A lovely person, a person he liked a hell of a lot.

And suddenly, he wished that the Admiral would go away. Soon. He still hadn't thanked Bonny; a nice way to do it would be with a kiss.



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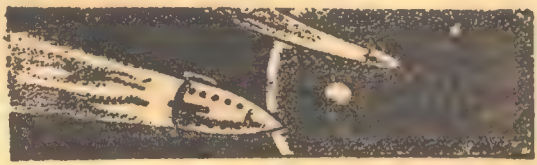
SCIENCE FICTION
★ QUARTERLY ★

Go To The Ant

NOVELET OF STRANGE DESTINY

by Walter Kubilius

A boy and a tired old man became the possessors of inter-world secrets that men must know, but which they could not be told!



THE CELLAR window shattered and the cheap frame house shook as the invading missile crashed into the cement wall.

"Donnie!" Mrs. Kennedy screamed as she dropped a dish in fright. "Stop playing with those chemicals! I declare," she said, turning to her husband, George, who was reading the newspapers sleepily, "that boy will be the death of us all with his experiments. I think it's time you should put a stop to them."

"Funny," George said, looking up from the papers, "I thought I heard Donnie's voice in the street. He couldn't be in the cellar."

Donnie, a thirteen-year-old with unruly hair and a panting breath, came dashing in from the hallway door. "A meteor!" he cried out excitedly; "Billie and I saw it flash out of the sky and come this way! It almost hit the house and landed in the cellar!"

"Meteor? Fiddlesticks!" his mother said; "you have too much imagination. That's what comes from reading those magazines. See what it is, pa."

Kennedy wearily put his newspaper down and got up from his armchair.

"Hurry up, pop," Donnie said, rushing to the cellar door. He switched on the light and stepped down the rickety wooden steps, his father close behind. Half of the cellar stored the winter's supply of coal; the other half was a sort of clubhouse for Donnie and his friends. The walls were lined with books and magazines; littered everywhere were pieces of tools, machines, and gadgets that Donnie had picked up from the city dump. The second cellar room was filled with dank smoke, and a gray powder filled the air.

When the small light was turned on, Kennedy swung a window open, and the air cleared quickly. One of the windows was broken through. On the floor, as if having fallen from a direct hit against the wall was a smashed jumble of metal about the size of a basketball.

It's natural enough for men to assume that the dominant species on other worlds should be anthropomorphic. And perhaps a non-anthropomorphic intelligence might make similar assumptions...



Into their minds came pictures of a strange world.

Donnie ran towards it, trembling with pleasure. It was the call of the unknown, for nothing like this had ever happened in the Kennedy home before. "Look!" he shouted, "it must have shot through the cellar window, hit the wall on the opposite side, and fallen down. It had a great big burning tail—almost like a comet!"

His father looked disinterestedly at the pieces of metal. He had seen too many bursts of enthusiasm on Donnie's part to be much impressed. "Any fool can see," he said, "that this is no shooting star. That's a piece of man-made machinery, Donnie, and don't you try to tell me any different."

"I know Pa," Donnie said, "but look at it! Maybe it came from Mars, or even Venus!"

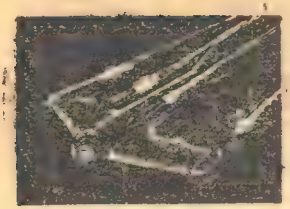
"Now look, Donnie, I want to talk to you—serious-like."

"But Pa, this might be an interplanetary missile sent by—"

"Donnie!"

"Yes, Pa."

"Donnie, you know that I want to



help you with your workshop and your experiments. I want you to be something better than me, for I didn't have any father to help me. But you have to be more careful. I don't have much money, toys and equipment are expensive. Now that Erector set you just busted..."

"That's no Erector set, Pa, that's..."

"Don't interrupt me, son. I don't know what you tried to make there. It looks like a broken football with a lot of wheels and wires in it. It cost money, whatever it was you tried to make. And that window has to be fixed; be more careful, Don."

"But that might be an interplanetary rocket, Pa!"

"And don't read so many of those magazines you borrow from your teacher, Mr. Wylie, and that dumb garage mechanic—what's his name—Shields. They're too old for you. Make friends your own age, like Billy. Fix that window and don't let me hear another word about that football gadget of yours. Not one word. Do you hear me?"

Pa was angry and there was nothing that Donnie could say but, "Yes, Pa."

•WHEN HIS FATHER WENT back upstairs, Donnie sat down beside the broken lump of metal for a closer look. It was egg-shaped and the front part had been sheared away by the impact, exposing an intricate mass of wires, rods, and wheels. It resembled the inside of a complicated watch.

Donnie rummaged through a nearby carton until he found his magnifying glass and tried to study the surprisingly tiny machines. The gears were barely visible, and throughout the object ran a series of long tubes filled with a shimmering light that seemed to pulsate in heart-beat rhythm. Another series of tubes encircled the outside of the unbroken half; tiny windows dotted the surface.

The half of the ball that he held in his hands was not solid. A large empty space ran through the center; cut through as it was, it appeared to be divided into three compartments, each about a half a foot square.

They had the peculiar appearance of rooms, for by looking at them closely under the magnifying glass Donnie could see that the walls were covered with paintings. Two of them showed a star-filled sky as seen from a mound-covered plain.

The other wall seemed to be the picture of a great tree. It was a curious sort of tree, for at each branch tip was, not a flower, but a strange kind of animal. Those at the bottom branches resembled ancient reptiles; here and there Donnie thought he could recognize a horse, a dog, and a bird. Halfway up the tree, as if on a branch that led nowhere, was a man. At the top of the tree, on the very tipmost branch was a figure that Donnie recognized instantly. It was the biggest one of all, fully an inch wide.

It was the picture of a black ant.

"Donnie!"

He stood up and ran to the foot of the cellar staircase.

"Yes, Ma?"

"Dinner's ready."

"In a minute, Ma! I'm busy."

"Come up this instant, Donnie, or I'll have Pa give you the beating of your life!"

He looked back toward the strange mechanical ball on the floor. "I'll be back," he whispered to himself, then went up the stairs.

"Pa tells me you broke your Erector set," his mother said as they sat

around the table. "Goodness sakes! The light and the noise it made! A body would think you were trying to blow up the house!"

"Yes, Ma," he said. "It was just the Erector set falling down. I'll fix it and it'll be all right."

HE FOUND IT DIFFICULT to eat and to pretend that he was not excited. The more Donnie thought of it, the more sure he was that the "Ball" was something from another planet. He had read something by H. G. Wells about the men from Mars. Could this be a rocket? Donnie looked up at his father, wanting to question him, but his father's eyes were tired. Kennedy worked hard at the factory and when he came home his mind was worn out. Donnie would have to wait and show it to Mr. Wylie, his science teacher; he would know.

But if it was a rocket, Donnie thought, as he absentmindedly cut and recut the slice of meat on his plate, the Martians must be awful small. The rocket was only about two feet long and a foot wide.

Where were they? Could they have escaped? No. The crash, if it didn't kill them, must have certainly knocked them unconscious. He had not seen any. There were none in the pieces of machinery, and none in the two rooms he had looked at. He remembered that there appeared to be space enough for a third room towards the rear of the rocket. Its entrance had been closed off by several needle-like pillars which fell across the oval-shaped doorway. If there were any Martians there, they must be imprisoned behind that doorway. If he could take some tools and open that doorway...

"Donnie!"

He came back to awareness of the food before him and started eating. When the meal was over he helped his mother clear the dishes, then did the homework that Mr. Wylie assigned him. When he finished it was too late to go to the cellar. Silently, and inwardly rebelling, he went upstairs to his bedroom.

"Pa," his mother's voice could be heard through the old wooden flooring, "I want you to come with me into the cellar and clean up whatever mess he made. I'm sure the place is a sight. Throw out all that garbage, break it up and get rid of it."

"I'm tired, hon."

Through the evening, alone in his small room, Donnie listened to his parents quarrel. It had always been like that as long as he could remember. He heard the slam of the cellar door and the faint click of his mother's heels on the steps. Later there came the swishing sound of a broom and the clank of metal being dragged across the cement floor. He heard the outside door open and then the clatter of the garbage can as his mother dumped the metal pieces. Donnie turned his head to the wall and wept.



IN THE MORNING, Donnie ate his breakfast in silence. His father was already at work and his mother's "sick headache" made her morose. When he packed his books for school the sanitation trucks were already coming. When he got outside, he reached quickly for the can, sending its cover crashing upon the sidewalk. He reached downward into the mass of garbage and brought out the oval-shaped mass of metal. Donnie ran back into the house and hid it underneath the bed and then went on to school.

●

"Mr. Wylie," he asked during the afternoon rest period, "What would

happen if a real, live Martian came to visit us on Earth?"

The schoolteacher smiled and his tired eyes looked at Donnie. "He would be killed," Wylie said bitterly, "The ignorant and the vicious would tear him apart, just as they do to all great men. We are more interested in bathing-beauties, flagpole-sitters, and dance-marathons than matters scientific."

"I wouldn't kill him," Donnie said, "would you?"

Mr. Wylie shook his gray head. "No, I wouldn't. In fact I would be happy to meet him—so if you ever see a Martian please introduce us."

The lines on his face softened as he looked at the young boy before him, "Maybe you are reading too much," he said kindly; "you should play more with your classmates and boys like Willie."

"Oh, Willie's a dope," Donnie said.

●

In the afternoon he returned home, practically running all the way in his eagerness to have another look at the Martian ball. The house was empty and he ran up the steps to the room. Maybe, he thought, he should have invited Willie to come with him.

He pushed the door of his room open. Willie, a fat, stocky boy with red hair and a freckle-covered face, was standing in a corner of the room. "Hiya, Donnie," the boy said.

"How did you get here?" Donnie demanded. He was certain he had left Willie in the schoolyard, playing ball with the other boys.

"Everything's all right, Donnie," the fat boy said; "I won't hurt you or do anything. Just don't get frightened. Everything will be all right."

"Why shouldn't everything be all right?" Donnie insisted, "What are you doing here and what do you want?" He looked about the room to see if Willie had taken anything. The carton in which the Martian ball rested was still there. None of the books had been touched. His clothes were the same. The mirror on the wall was the same. The mirror... He looked sharply. The mirror faced him and Willie's back was toward him. Yet there was only one image in the mirror and that was Donnie. Willie had no reflection.

●

AS SOON AS THE THOUGHT formed in his mind, Willie's reflection appeared on the glass. Donnie's heart began to beat rapidly. "There is nothing to be afraid of," Willie said quietly. "Everything will be all right."

Donnie looked closely at him. Through Willie he could see, ever so faintly, the paper-covered wall and the carton in which he had placed the ball that morning. Willie's outline shimmered and seemed to change.

"I am not really Willie," the boy was saying quickly, "but this is the best way I can make myself understood by you. I am not going to harm you. I need your help very much; I am in trouble and only you can help me."

Donnie's heart still beat madly, but fear that had gripped him began to die down. Of course this was not Willie. He had read about ghosts before and knew that they could assume other forms at will.

"Who are you?" he asked weakly.

"I am Garan," he said, "explorer, third grade, for the Queen Mother on Kiga, fourth planet encircling the binary of Kigo."

The Willie-image flickered as did the pictures in the cheap movie houses. "My vessel unfortunately materialized within the Earth's gravitational and magnetic fields and I almost lost control. Sorry that I damaged—damaged ...I—I have been hurt..."

The image disappeared and Donnie saw only his own frightened reflection in the mirror. Had Mr. Wylie been right and he had been reading too many magazines? But no—the man-

gled ball, now a jumble of loose pieces, still lay within the carton. Uneasily he walked towards it and looked at the mass.

The thing had been smashed still more when his parents flung it into the garbage can. The interior was broken, and the room which had the pictures was crushed. An oval doorway the size of a quarter and apparently leading to the last inner chamber twisted crazily. Donnie rummaged



through his things until he found a razor blade and tweezers. He forced the tiny door open and ripped it away. There wasn't much light, so he could not peer into the tiny room which must have been about six inches deep and three inches high and wide. He lifted the mass out of the carton, turned it upside down and shook it.

Something fell down, a black lump, dull and lifeless. Donnie brought over the bedside lamp so that the full light would fall on the thing. It was a black ant about three inches long.

Its two tentacles twisted uneasily as it turned its head to look up at him. The six legs struggled weakly as it tried to move.

Donnie put the metal ball back into the carton. He looked wonderingly at the ant. It was impossible that something so small could make an image appear before Donnie, yet he had talked to the thing which looked like Willie, and he had heard its voice.

"My legs have been broken," a voice said. It came faintly from the floor where the ant lay. Donnie bent down so he could hear it better. "The accident has damaged me considerably and it may be several days before I can recover. Would you hide me in some safe place—a box perhaps—until I am well enough to leave?"

"Sure," Donnie said, "I could put you in one of my magazine cartons. Mother never sweeps there."

"Thank you, Donnie."

•IT WAS STRANGE, TALKING with an ant. Hesitantly Donnie asked, "How do you know my name and how is it you can talk as I do? Don't you speak Martian?"

"No," the black ant said, "We Kigan have no language but communicate among ourselves telepathically and by radiating nerve impulses. I am not from Mars, but from a double-sun which I call Kiga, though it may bear another name among your people. I can read your mind since the Man-brain sends out impulses similar to those which you pick up on your crystal set. In the same way, I can project impulses which register upon the visual and aural nerves of your brain. You imagine that you are hearing my voice, though there is no vibration in the air. That is how I made you imagine you saw a familiar friend, though I neglected to create the illusion of a reflection in the mirror."

Donnie built a small hideaway for the black ant by taking some abandoned pencil boxes and placing them in back of the book shelf. He picked up the ant with a sheet of paper and placed it gently within the enlarged box.

"Do not tell anyone that I am here," the ant's voice seemed to be saying, "for I gather from your mind that this planet's Men fear us and would destroy me."

"You're safe here," Donnie assured him. "Let me bring Mr. Wylie. He knows a lot about everything; I think he could help you."

"Not yet," the ant said; "I need food and care. There are several ant species with colonies in your home. I can sense the Queen-Mother's radiation. I shall call upon them for help, for even though they are undeveloped and lack reasoning power I can make them serve me. Please do not disturb them when they come."

The ant fell silent and Donnie did not know what to say or do. He could not shake off the feeling that this was nothing but a too-vivid day-dream. It was the sight of a row of tiny red ants, scurrying toward the bookshelves, that made him know the reality of the Black Ant and his words. He resisted the impulse to sweep the floor clean of the hurrying ants; Garan would not like that.

Donnie stayed in his room the rest of the day, eyes constantly turning to the bookshelves but there was no word or image there. Towards evening he began to feel silly, as if he had imagined everything. He went to the bookshelf and drew out the big copy of Froissart and looked into the box. What he saw made him turn his eyes quickly and slip the book in place. The body of Garan, the Black Ant from Kiga, was covered with a small army of tiny red dots.

For three days the Kigan ant lay within the box, neither seen nor touched by Donnie. He dared not even touch any of the books that lined the walls, for he imagined that the red ants had taken over the whole of the house to serve Garan. They seemed to crawl everywhere, and it was only when Donnie began to be afraid that his mother would begin a general housecleaning that they diminished in number.

•ON THE MORNING OF THE fourth day Garan's voice rang within Donnie's mind. "I am well," it said, "take me to your friend, Mr. Wylie."

"I can't," Donnie protested, immediately picturing a mob of school friends demanding that he share this new pet with them, and some even insisting that it be stamped upon.

Garan must have understood this. "I will go in your briefcase. Take me to him at the end of your class."

•

Donnie could keep his mind on nothing during the day's lessons. His mind was always upon the briefcase that nestled between his legs. When the class was dismissed, he waited until all had left. As Mr. Wylie reached for his coat in the teachers' closet, Donnie approached him.

"Is something the matter?" Mr. Wylie asked, seeing the boy's pale face.

Donnie put the briefcase upon a classmate's desk and unsnapped the lock while the teacher looked on.

The black ant slowly crawled out as Donnie watched the teacher's shocked expression.

"Good Lord!" Mr. Wylie said.

Donnie felt a strange thrill of pride shoot through him as Garan, his black body shining sleekly, walked to the center of the desk and faced the teacher.

"I am Garan," the ant said in words meant for Mr. Wylie, but which also formed in Donnie's brain, "explorer for the Queen-Mother of Kiga which is the fourth planet encircling our binary sun. My vessel shattered in landing and this Man-child, a pupil of yours, has saved my life. The Code of Kiga, which defines the action of an explorer in all possible contingencies, demands that my presence on the planet always be kept secret lest I influence the development of the native civilization. Yet it is impossible

★ Information, Please!

Shall we continue to offer originals to the writers of the best-liked letters in "Down to Earth?" If you approve, vote for your favorites — the best three. If you disapprove, let us know. We'll abide by the majority decision. — The Editor

for me to return to Kiga, or even to conduct my studies here, without your aid; I have no means of aerial or interstellar transportation. Will you help me?"

Mr. Wylie had lived long and seen much, but apparently this was a new situation for him. He sat down weakly upon a desktop and glanced at Donnie to see if the boy had also heard the thought of this giant ant which seemed to claim extra-planetary origin. Donnie nodded.

"What can we do?" the teacher said.

"Take me to your centers of learning and information," the Kigan ant said, "so that I may learn the accomplishments of your civilization. That will not be difficult, for I need only study your history and sciences to fulfill my purpose in coming here. I will also need help in building a new vessel which will take me back to Kiga. This is the most difficult task of all, for the techniques used in flight are probably completely beyond your science. I cannot teach you—that is against the Code—but perhaps your fabrication centers could produce the parts for me. I might build the ship myself with the aid of the primitive red ant species that I have noticed in Donnie's home. I need your help."



IT WAS THE beginning of a strange friendship in which a boy and a schoolteacher served as agents of a double-star thousands of light years away. Whatever doubts Mr. Wylie had vanished when Garan produced images of Kiga and showed them the nature of Kigan life.

The hiding place behind Donnie's books was soon abandoned and Mr. Wylie gave his empty garage to the Black Ant. The interior was cleaned and Mr. Wylie ripped up the cement floor so the earth would be bare beneath.

"Here I will build," Garan told them, "a temporary city with the aid of the thousands of red ant colonies in this area. The termites of Africa would be more suitable for city-building, but I can use the ants available. The outer walls of the garage will remain as a camouflage. Tunnels will be built under the earth to all the colonies within several miles of the garage. When I have mastered the Queens and have bred sufficient workers capable of building the vessel, you will get for me the necessary raw metal materials that I will need."

A small workroom near the entrance of the garage was left untouched and it was here that Garan "talked" to Donnie and Mr. Wylie. Within the room he produced picture images of Kiga. The boy and the teacher saw the great globe of Kiga encircling the double-suns, and then seemed to swoop down upon the planet for a closer view of the ant civilization.

The Kigan, they learned, were the highest developed form of civilized, reasoning life on virtually all the explored planets in the Milky Way galaxy. Their skyscraper-like cities covered Kiga which had reached the acme of progress and had mastered interstellar travel.

Nature, Garan told them by means constantly experimented with new life forms. In most of the inhabited worlds that the Kigans explored, the ant was the first and the highest intelligent species. Yes, there were Men on Kiga and both Donnie and Mr. Wylie were horrified when they saw the images of shaggy brutes howling in their wilderness caves and eating the raw flesh of forest beasts.

"They are afraid even to come near our cities," Garan said; "sometimes we capture Men and put them in our zoos. Frequently they are domesticated, and make fine pets."

They saw the image of a tame hairy

Man with a fixed smile upon an empty face. Matted in his hair and in receptacles strapped to his back were the Kigans who owned him.

"While an anthropological student," Garan said, "I wrote a thesis for a degree advancing the theory that under certain favorable conditions, it would be Men and not Ants which would develop the ability to reason. I confess that this was written as a joke, but one of the university professors took my thesis seriously and asked me to pursue the subject more thoroughly.

"I did not dare tell him that my thesis was a jest and that I certainly didn't believe anything so ridiculous. Reasoning Men! Why, Man had been on Kiga for millions of years. Even primitive Kigan had domesticated him and in all that time there had never been any sign of reasoning Men. Of course, isolated individuals had been trained to count up to ten, and could respond to as many as forty different word-images, but these were mutations and the ability was apparently not hereditary."

Garan, the Black Ant continued, was finally commissioned as an Explorer and journeyed throughout the galaxy searching for new life-forms that would substantiate his theory. In many of the planets he found traces of Man in geologic strata, and frequently he found Men preserved on reservations by Ants. But nowhere did he find reasoning Men except on the planet Earth. The news would shock the galaxy; it was the biggest discovery since fire and atomic power. He would become the most famous Explorer of all time. Surely Donnie and Mr. Wylie realized the importance of it all?

DONNIE AND MR. WYLIE realized it, and at times they felt a surge of fear at the thought of the Earth, alone in a universe of Ant-dominated stars and planets.

It was Donnie who voiced that fear. "You," he said, reproachfully, "keep Men as—as slaves!"

"Slaves?" Garan protested, "certainly not! Only as pets. They are well-fed and taken care of, and certainly far healthier than they would be running wild in the forest."

"It—it sounds terrible," Donnie said, "We never do such things to Ants; we let them alone."

"I admit you do not. That is only because it is not possible, considering the extremely low level of ant intelligence on this planet. If their intelligence were higher, would not the ants suffer the same fate that you have dealt out to horses, chickens, cattle, dogs, and other species?"

"But none of these species have the possibility for intellectual development," Mr. Wylie said.

"Why not? Who is to say that some of the birds you keep in cages may not develop an avian culture superior to yours?"

"Then you intend," Mr. Wylie said, "to awaken the latent intelligence of our ants so that they may in time progress and surpass Men of Earth? You will teach them machinery and science and develop their ability to reason. Is that what you plan for this giant ant-house which the reds are building for you?"

For the first time, Garan hesitated before projecting clarified thoughts into the minds of Donnie and Wylie. The images had always been sharp but now they flickered as if the Black Ant were unable to commit himself fully to one line of thought. It was even possible, Wylie felt—and knew that Garan had immediately sensed the suspicion—that the Black Ant was preparing a lie.

"The Code of Kiga," Garan said finally, the words ringing clear in their minds, "states definitely that when a planet's civilization approaches an impasse and cannot progress, every explorer is duty bound to break the log-jam and use his skill to awake the latent intelligence."

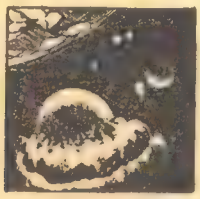
"Then you will do it here," Wylie said flatly, "and will use us as tools for the purpose of your species."

"An unusual situation has occurred on Earth," Garan said. "The Ant here has become stagnant for so long that the intelligence-vacuum has been swept into by a relatively new creature—Man. It appears that there must always be one dominant reasoning species, and that once it takes over the planet its very existence prevents the development of other species,"

"Nowhere does the Code," he went on, "specifically state Ant-Civilization. It is always 'a reasoning civilization.' While I suspect that the authors of the code always considered 'ant' and 'reasoning' as synonymous, this does not change matters. The fact is that on Earth it is Man and not the Ant which has produced a reasoning civilization. I cannot, as a Kigan who is loyal to the Code, foster the development of another species which would, in time, destroy the planet in a death struggle. Two species-civilizations cannot exist side by side; one or the other must be dominant."

"What will you do?" Wylie asked, "and what will happen to Donnie and me, and Mankind?"

"I will go back to Kiga," Garan said, "and make my report on Earth. The Queen-Mother will decide this planet's fate."



THEY WERE SILENT. IN answer to their unspoken questions, Garan showed them images of what Kiga had done to worlds which produced organisms and species destructive to ant-life. They saw huge wave-producing mechanisms sending ray after ray into the general area of the doomed planet's sun. Abruptly there came a flash as the sun exploded into a brilliant nova, cleansing and destroying the encircling worlds.

This was the power of the ant-civilization, Donnie knew, and the Earth would come face-to-face with it when Garan returned to Kiga. Donnie knew nothing about warfare, but he realized how ineffective guns, battleships, and airplanes would be against a world that could explode the stars themselves. He turned to look at Wylie whose face mirrored the same thoughts that ran through Donnie's mind.

"Interesting," Wylie said in a strained voice. The tiny room in which they stood was quiet against the background of the humming ant hive that surrounded them. Garan was on the floor between them. As the image of the burnt, blackened planets faded before them Wylie twisted. He brought his knee up suddenly, his face contorted with fury. Savagely he brought his heel down upon the head of the Black Ant. The floor seemed to jar with the vicious stroke. Garan's body crunched beneath the foot and a slimy blot oozed from beneath the heel, staining the clean, white floor.

"You killed him!" Donnie exclaimed. Wylie, his face ashen-white and hands trembling, lifted his foot away. From the brown mass a black leg twitched weakly. "He would have killed us all," Wylie said, his voice cracking as he strained to calm himself, "We wouldn't have a chance against a species that can do so much. I—I couldn't let him live long enough to get back to Kiga! We cannot let them know how weak we are when compared with them."

They stared fascinatedly at the brown stain upon the floor that had once been Garan, explorer for the black ant world of Kiga.

"You shouldn't." Donnie said, reproachfully.

"I am still alive," a voice rang in their ears. The pulpy mass upon the floor disappeared. A short distance

away, sleek, black, and unharmed stood Garan.

"Have you forgotten," he asked, "that I can read your minds and react to your reflexes even before you do? The thing you stamped upon was only an image that I created in your minds. I could just as easily have destroyed you. Make no such foolish gesture again for you can never know whether I am the reality or an illusion."

Wylie put his hands to his pockets to still their trembling. His face was that of a man walking towards death. "You must not go back," he said, knowing full well that his words would not change the decision of the Black Ant, "If Kiga decides to annihilate or enslave us we are lost. Give us time! Stay here for a decade, fifty years, or a half century—and give us time! Wait till we develop atomic power and rocket travel, for only then can we meet as equal species. It is too soon, now; we are hopelessly inferior to you. Give us time!"

GARAN'S TENTACLES twitched uneasily. "I cannot decide," he said, and the thought-words he created sounded inexorable; "The Code says I must return to Kiga immediately. It will be the Queen-Mother, in whose mind is the accumulated wisdom of our race, who will decide."

"How long?" Wylie asked, his voice dead.

"A few weeks to build the vessel and—in your time sequence—five years to reach Kiga and five to return. I must build a communicator which converts mass into radiating energy. The spaceship is then transformed into power, directed at Kiga, and materialized there. The journey is virtually instantaneous, but the difference in time-ratio between our worlds means that about ten years will pass before any Kigan vessels, carrying either annihilation-weapons or diplomatic representatives, can return."

"How will you build the vessel?" Wylie asked. Donnie turned to him in surprise for there was a new inflection in his voice. It had the sound of a dead man. Wylie's eyes were empty as if all hope had left them. Donnie could not understand this; vaguely he knew that Kiga was a threat to his world, but his imagination was conquered by thoughts of a strange world with a strange civilization. He wanted to see that Ant-world of Kiga which could destroy a solar system at will. They had power more magnificent than anything Donnie had read in the books on his shelves. There was a war across the seas, for this was 1940, but none of the European armies could compare with the might of this small black ant.

Garan told them the basic theory of interstellar travel. Since mass and energy were synonymous, it needed only the development of suitable conversion mechanisms to annihilate the distance between the stars. Over one-fifth of the Milky Way galaxy had been explored by the Kigans and even if Garan had not come to Sol, other explorers would have reached it, in time. Soon a Kigan vessel would attempt the greatest feat of all. It was an extra-galactic expedition.

The Black Ant needed no books or specimens to take with him. The thought-images which he constantly captured from the minds of the people in the community were enough. The sample of thinking which he would bring back would be analyzed by the Queen-Mother and suitable conclusions regarding the fate of Earth would be made.

COMING SOON

ENNUI

an off-trail story
by Milton Lesser



IN THE MEANTIME Garan needed the help of Donnie and Wylie. For the rest of the month, Donnie did little but walk the streets of the city with the Black Ant safely hidden within a pencil box under his arm. Occasionally Garan would tell him to stop or to turn in another direction. At such moments, Donnie knew that the Kigan ant was sampling the thought currents that swirled invisibly about them. He needed no books or pictures but tapped the minds of the most learned as easily as Donnie absorbed the simple stories in the textbooks for younger children.

The ant-hive, camouflaged within the old framework garage, was at last completed and Garan's plans for the building of the space vessel were ready. He outlined them briefly to Donnie and Wylie when they came on their daily visit to the single room immediately behind the garage entrance door.

"The Code," he said, "does not permit me to employ any techniques which would affect the development of the culture. The rocket must be built in secret. I can arrange the assembly through the red ants in this building. Their nervous systems are so undeveloped that I can control their every operation. The construction or preparation of such raw materials as girders, wiring, fuels, and so on, can best be done by Man-run laboratories. Wylie, you will establish several dummy companies which will appear to manufacture such things as watches and precision tools requiring microscopic care. These companies will purchase the necessary materials which will then be given to the hive for assemblage into the space vessel."

Wylie's shoulders sagged as if new burdens had been placed upon his old body. Whatever hopes he had for quiet study of Kigan life were fast disappearing. "We have no money," he said.

"I went with Donnie for a walk through Wall Street," Garan's voice-image said. "I think Baker, the former Secretary of Treasury, and now president of the Baker Trust, will be pleased to finance you."

Once more Garan entered the pencil box under Donnie's armpit. This time Wylie came with them. The teacher was aging rapidly and his hair was already streaked with gray. Donnie felt a touch of pity when the old man walked through the impressive portals of the Baker Trust Building and asked permission of a polite but condescending official to see the legendary L. T. Baker. Mechanically the man reached for an interview-application blank but stopped suddenly as his face twisted in surprise.

Garan had taken over.

"Of course," the official said, "I will take you to him immediately."

He led them through imposing rooms and past startled secretaries. He opened a final door and Wylie and Donnie entered, leaving the official behind them.

A new figure formed beside Donnie. It was a brisk, dapper businessman with the air of one accustomed to being obeyed.

"Who the blazes let you in?" Baker demanded.

"My credentials from the President," the Garan-image said, opening a briefcase and placing an empty sheet of paper upon the desk. Baker looked at it and paled.

"Who told him?" he demanded; "he won't dare prosecute me."

The Garan-image smiled knowingly. He described the interest with which the government party had studied his record in the Treasury. He told him where his secret meetings with auto and oil officials had been witnessed, and in what accounts the bribe money, stocks, and bonds had been placed.

The names, dates, and figures were listed and as the Garan-image spoke, the great Baker financial empire tottered and fell.

When it was over the image told him that all was not lost. As a token of his deep friendship for Baker, the President would forego prosecution if the financier would take an active interest in the companies which his good friend, Joseph Wylie, was interested in starting.

L. T. Baker was very much interested and the Trust would be delighted to cooperate.

•IN TWO WEEKS TIME, WYLIE Enterprises, Inc. were established and a number of new processes developed for the production of unusually small ladies' wrist watches, and precision parts for fine machinery. Through the summer months Wylie moved like a bewildered child who suddenly finds himself regarded as a powerful adult. He never forgot the foundation upon which his sudden fortune was built, and his eyes grew emptier and his face sadder as time went on.

Donnie's parents profited by the friendship of their young son with the ex-schoolteacher, who became an industrial genius overnight. No longer did they protest when Donnie, pencil-box securely under his arm, walked along through the streets of New York, suddenly stopping as if he heard a voice within him speak.

The new plant of Wylie Enterprises was built a few blocks away from the garage which still served as Garan's home. Underground ant tunnels connected the two buildings and each morning the bright young technicians whom Wylie hired found new orders upon their desks. The materials requested were always microscopic in size, and, once finished, were sent to Mr. Wylie's office where they eventually disappeared. It was an eccentricity of Mr. Wylie, the employees



said, to build the plant so that several rooms and offices rested upon solid ground without any intervening flooring.

Donnie's summer job, as office-boy in the plant, kept him in daily contact with Wylie, though the Black Ant seldom appeared before them. Whether he used other tools to carry himself about the city, or whether the building of the space vessel took all his time, they did not know. Kiga was never discussed, nor did Donnie ever think of the distant planet which would someday perhaps send thousands of aircraft here to change the destiny of the Earth. The red ants he had once ignored now appeared to be spectres of the future, each seeming to hint, *"The world will soon be ours."*

The vessel was nearing completion. Donnie could tell by the swift reduction in orders for materials to be delivered to Mr. Wylie's personal office. Only once did Wylie and Donnie take the Black Ant to L. T. Baker, and that was so the Garan-image could tell the financier that no additional funds were required, that within a month the project would be liquidated and Baker Trust could take over.

•

It was in the week following that interview that Baker finally struck. The second shift had closed at the plant and Donnie accompanied Mr. Wylie to his private car.

"Gosh, Mr. Wylie," he said, "when is all this going to end?"

Wylie, his hair now completely white, shook his head. "Don't talk about it," he said; "he may be tapping your mind now. Think nothing.

Say nothing. Do nothing." His voice rose higher as if it was reaching the breaking point and could no longer bear a terrible strain. His figure was slight and it seemed that only the haunted look in his eyes kept him going.

They reached the car, and only when the chauffeur opened the door so they could see the men with guns inside, did they realize it was the wrong one.

"I will shoot to kill if either of you make one sound," the chauffeur said. They stepped inside. As they sat down the men put bandages around their eyes and tied their hands in back of them.

"Don't twist," Donnie said; "it hurts." The gun butt came down swiftly and there was nothing but darkness and pain, and the faint roar of a swiftly-moving car.

HE CAME TO A FEW HOURS later in a small, dark room. He was tied to a chair in the corner. In the center, tied down beneath a single glaring lamp, was Wylie, his eyes still bandaged and his head hanging low, chin upon frail chest.

"Slap him out of it," L. T. Baker said.

The two men standing in back of the chair nodded and let loose with the ends of leather belts in their hands. Donnie closed his eyes. When he opened them Wylie's head was lifted.

"I—I can't say anything," he moaned, "I can't!"

"How did you do it?" Baker demanded brutally, his voice was cruel. His hands leaped forward and he clutched at Wylie's throat. "Five million dollars! How did you do it! Why! Why! *Why!*"

He struck the teacher savagely against the face and then leaned back in his own chair, weeping in fury. "The President knew nothing about it," he sobbed in frustrated anger; "I checked every lead that so-called agent gave me. It was all built on lies! Lies! No one knew but him—and he doesn't even exist!" He got up crazily from the chair and ran to his desk, tearing up papers.

"Photographs," he said, "dozens of them taken by the best photographers in the country. I had it all planned when you and that unknown would step into my office again. I would identify you, track you down and kill you—him, whoever it was. I talked with him. Shook hands with him. Look, here, photographic film showing the handshake and he is not even there! You did it by hypnotism, didn't you, Wylie? How did you find out things that no one in the world knows but myself? How? Why? *Tell me!*"

"I—I can't," Wylie moaned.

"Keep on beating him until he talks," Baker screamed, "and then start on the kid."

"Sure, L. T.," one of the men said, and then gave a slight scream.

"Beat him! Tell me, Wylie, if it was you or not. I have the plant and garage encircled and they'll burn every inch of it down. We'll burn it down, every inch of it, and kill him if he is there. If he doesn't exist, and it was you all the time, tell me and I'll call off the mob."

One of the two men standing behind the slumped body of Wylie suddenly sagged and slipped to the floor.

"What the devil's the matter with him?" Baker demanded.

"Don't know," the other man said; "this place is loaded with ants and they're biting like hell."

"Never mind that," Baker said, "beat this crook."

The man raised his belt and then fell forward upon his face. He twitched for a moment upon the floor and was then still. Baker looked at the two bodies, stupefied, then slapped his neck. He looked at his hand.

"Blasted place is filled with ants," he said. "I don't know how you did it, Wylie, but you finished me and

I'm going to finish you and the kid."

He reached for the back of his pocket and came forward with a gun. Before he could pull the trigger his eyes turned glassy and his legs gave way. He fell with a thud and lay still.

The red ants crawled over Donnie and Wylie, moistening the ropes which then gradually dissolved and broke.

"He's sent a mob of hoodlums to destroy the plant and the garage," Wylie said swiftly, "We must hurry and save Garan."

They left the small house and found the car still standing. They rode quickly and in silence. The streets near the garage were filled with strange faces that looked suspiciously at them when they stopped. Ignoring the hostile eyes Wylie and Donnie ran to the garage entrance and stepped in. Wylie locked the door behind them.



GARAN, the Black Ant from Kiga, stood upon the table, his six tiny legs holding him firmly. The tentacles waved imperceptibly.

"The debt is paid," Garan said, the words meant for Donnie, "You saved my life when I crashed on Earth, and I saved you from the hands of Baker. The Code has taught us loyalty and gratitude and I shall remember this if we ever meet again."

"Baker's mob has surrounded us," Wylie said, his voice trembling excitedly, "He'll burn the plant down and kill all of us."

"Baker is dead," Garan said, "Let the mob do what it wills; the vessel is finished."

Outside there was a shout and the loud roar of trampling feet as the mob broke and ran toward the factory and garage.

"Bring up the gasoline!" someone yelled. There was a loud crack and the excited cry of people as the garage suddenly caught fire.

"Into the hive," Garan ordered; "the walls are impervious to flame."

A large door, stone-like in appearance, swung open and Donnie and Wylie walked into the hive for the first time. In the center of the empty oval-shaped interior was a table-sized platform. Upon it rested a gleaming ball about four feet in diameter. A ramp led from the floor to a tiny circular entrance in its center. Up this ramp Garan walked alone.

"Where are the ants?" Donnie asked. "I thought this was going to be a regular ant-heap."

"It was," Garan said, "The workers have been killed off, now that their job is finished, and the soldiers have returned to the colonies which bred them. Their work is done and they return to the life they led before my arrival. I have not changed their cultures; that is a decision which only the Queen-Mother can make."

"But what of us?" Wylie asked, his eyes clearing and his back straightening. It was as if a burden had been lifted from him and he was able to speak and think his own thoughts again.

"These are your own people," Garan said, "You must remain. The outer shell of the garage is burning away and exposing the rocky walls of the hive. In a few moments the police will be here to disperse the mob. You will be saved, then, and your life is again your own."

•THEY COULD HEAR THE shouts and screams of the outside mob. Baker's agents worked well in stirring up hatred for Wylie. There were cries for his life. The old teacher listened to them. He looked to Donnie as if for a word of support, but the boy could do nothing. He turned then to Garan, who was already within the four-foot vessel, standing in its tiny doorway.

"I have lost everything for you," Wylie said. "I have stolen, lied, and broken the law to raise money for your ship. Sooner or later, no matter what our courts decide, Baker's agents will find and kill me, thinking I was responsible for his death and the break-up of his empire. All this because of you—and now you leave me to face destruction or long years in prison. No one will believe if I tell them the truth, that it was you who controlled my will and brain. If I do, the rest of my life will be spent in insane asylums while I wonder if the world of Kiga and the Black Ant was nothing but the delusion of an old, tired, brain. All this because of you, Garan, explorer for Kiga."

Garan was silent. Donnie, as always, remained silent, too, knowing that this strange life upon which he had entered when he found the vessel in his cellar, would soon close.

He would return again to his school work and his books, for the summer was ending and September was here. Once more *Ma* and *Pa* would smile when he read those magazines with the bright pictures of make-believe beings on other worlds. In time he would forget, but there was no forgetting for Mr. Wylie. He had not watched, like Donnie, but he had taken part in a secret drama and this, the first act, was now over.

"What can I do?" Garan asked.

"Take me with you," Wylie said, "Take me to Kiga!"

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Garan's answer came from no human throat, for the words existed only in the minds of Donnie and the teacher. Still, there was agony in its sound. The words of the Black Ant were those of a man torn between two worlds and knowing that his friend could live in neither.

"Among us you would be nothing but a museum specimen," he said. "In my own home, you would be only a pet for amusement. All the Men you would meet would be worse than the vile animals you keep in your zoos. You could not live among them. Nor could you live among us, for our world is complex beyond your understanding. There would be nothing for you but loneliness for the rest of your days."

From the outside they could hear the siren of the police cars and the screech of the fire engines. There was a roar as the mob made way for the cars.

Within the ominous silence of the empty, cavernous hive, they waited. "I know that," Wylie said. "There is nothing left for me but the pursuit of knowledge. All my life I have been alone in trying to understand Man's place in the universe. While my friends became engineers, soldiers, factory hands, and successful businessmen I spent my life dreaming of the other stars. There is nothing here for me on a warring Earth. Let me go to Kiga and see what other worlds are like!"

The screech of the police cars came nearer and then stopped. Automobile doors slammed and heavy steps padded on the earth surrounding the burnt garage frame. There was a hammering upon the stone-like wall of the ant-heap.

"What the hell is this stuff?" someone shouted. "Get a pick-axe and tear it down."

"You will come with me," Garan said.

"What of me?" Donnie demanded. In the excitement they had forgotten him. Never before had he felt so much like a child, lost and bewildered among forces that were beyond his control or understanding.

"Your life is still before you," Garan said. "They will ask questions. Tell them nothing and in time they will forget you."

A corona-like glow encircled the four-foot ball and waves of power mounted swept out from it. A portion of the corona, like a living flame,

broke off from the vessel and crackling angrily stood poised above the tired, broken figure of the old school teacher.

"Good-by, Donnie," he said.

THE FLAME GREW, twisting grotesquely and shifting through the colors of the spectrum. It descended suddenly upon Wylie, a shrill whine whipping through the hive. The flame seemed to burst and its million individual pieces flung apart against the walls, bounced back and were absorbed by the quietly glowing vessel upon the stand.

"I have transformed him into pure energy," Garan's voice said in Donnie's mind. "He has been absorbed into the electromagnetic field particles of force, able to cross the interstellar void. He will know nothing of the vast journey, and when we are reconverted into physical form upon the soil of Kiga it will seem as if we had taken but one step from your world into mine."

"What of me?" Donnie repeated. The clamoring on the outside was louder. The pickaxes were now ripping an entrance into the stone walls.

"I will make my report to the Queen-Mother," the Black Ant said. "There are only two possibilities before us. We shall either admit that a Man-civilization is possible, and send diplomatic representatives to make peace with you before Men discover atomic power and interstellar travel, or," —and here his voice changed, as if he knew that this second possibility was the actual one— "we shall decide that your race is vile because of its wars and history of destruction. If that is the decision, we shall return with weapons and cleanse this planet, making it possible for the Ant to grow and become the dominant life-form."

Donnie remembered the pictures Garan had shown of a star suddenly turned into a nova, and of the blackened, lifeless planet.

"How long?" he asked.

"Ten years of your time, Donnie! In ten years, I shall return!"

The vessel upon the table seemed to explode in a staggering wave of light and energy that sent Donnie crashing against the wall. The walls around him faded and disappeared and before darkness settled upon him he saw a portion of the night sky and the great multitude of stars that littered the Milky Way.

They found Donnie's body, unconscious but unharmed, lying in a putrid mass of burnt and putrescent material. Examination later proved it to be composed of thousands of bodies of dead ants. The boy, when examined, knew nothing whatever of Wylie or L. T. Baker.

The newspapers on that day in September, 1940, carried some reports of Baker's death and the mysterious riot and fire which wiped out Wylie Enterprises, Inc. Considering the war news, it did not get much attention.

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The years passed. Donnie is now 23 years old and a minor technician in one of the local atomic plants. He told me this story yesterday.

As for myself, who am I? I am a fighter plane pilot in the U. S. Air Force. I was one of those assigned to investigate that recent flurry of flying saucers which seemed to be encircling the Earth. They are gone now, of course, but Donnie is afraid that they have left because their mission is complete. As soon as they are out of range, the weapons of destruction they have planted will explode.

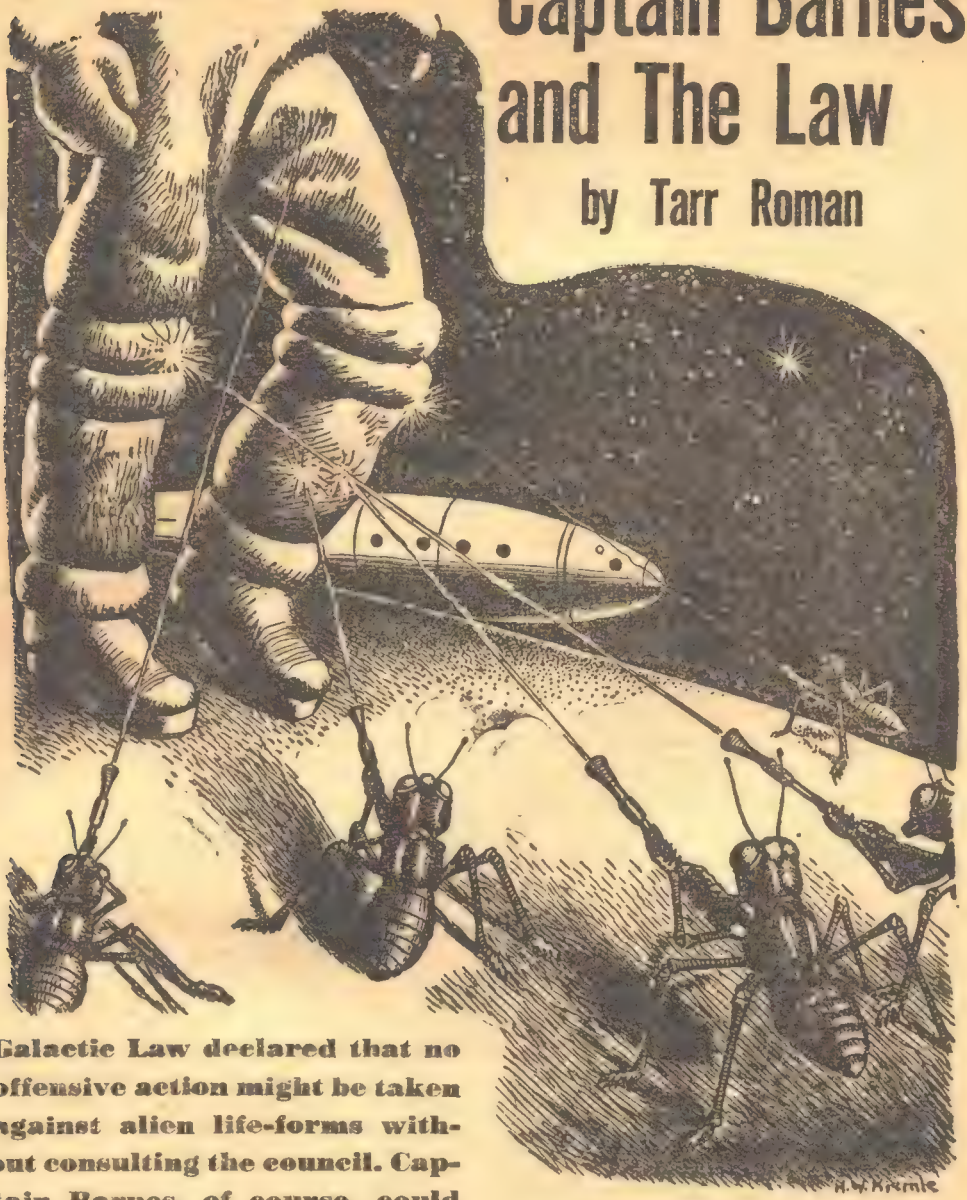
Donnie does not know what the holocaust will be. Perhaps atomic fire; perhaps poison gas. I do not believe it, of course, but in my barracks I can see all sorts of ants, red, black, and brown. Whatever comes, I think that they—like the poor—shall inherit the Earth.

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"Those little devils nearly burned the suit off me!"

Captain Barnes and The Law

by Tarr Roman



Galactic Law declared that no offensive action might be taken against alien life-forms without consulting the council. Captain Barnes, of course, could defend himself if attacked, but he'd have to prove the necessity when he returned. And, in this case, the only way Barnes could prove that these creatures were dangerous was to sit back and let them destroy this ship!

THE SPACE cruiser, *Rigel* wallowed in deep space, a billion miles from nowhere on the edge of the galaxy, her slashed hull gleaming dully in the starlight. Halfway down her long body, a detail of space-suited men worked clumsily around the jagged hole a meteor had torn in the ship, striving to cover it with steel plate. Off to the side, Captain Barnes

It's a wonderful hobby, drawing up codes of conduct for exploration and occupation teams, etc. You sit at home, safe in your familiar environment, comfortably assured that your ethics are the finest ever dreamed, and quite untainted with much of any notion as to what conditions are actually like out yonder. You draw up your masterly codes of conduct—which may be excellent for the home environment—and woe to the luckless explorer who violates the law! This sort of high-order abstraction lost England her American colonies, and England was neither the first nor the last to lose domains that way. But do you suppose we humans will have learned better by the time interworld voyages come into being? Well, if we haven't, Captain Barnes' predicament won't be exceptional, by any means!

stood, discussing the damage with his chief navigator, Moran.

"Did you ever hear of such luck?" growled Barnes, disgustedly, through his communicator. "Running into a meteor-shower way out here. What with the engine room wrecked, and the overdrive controls knocked out, we're stuck for at least two days."

"We're lucky the damn thing wasn't any bigger," agreed Moran, gloomily. "A little more mass and we'd all be stray bits of energy floating around the galaxy. Lord, what a run that was! I thought we were finished a dozen times; that shower was deep!"

"Not so deep," said Barnes. "A five-minute run through a meteor-shower just seems like an eternity. But I guess we have to be thankful we came through alive; we'll get the ship repaired and be on our way as fast as we can." He glanced nervously around at the dimly lit void. "I don't know. Out here at the tail end of the galaxy, I get kind of jumpy."

"I know what you mean," admitted Moran. "The area hasn't been explored thoroughly and you never know what. . ." His words trailed off and he strained his eyes out into the blackness to see. "Captain! That star is getting bigger!"

"Where?" demanded Barnes, cutting his eyes around sharply.

"No, wait a minute. It isn't a star; it seems like a small meteor coming down near the bow. Only it's got a light on it."

"What the devil," exclaimed the captain, following Moran's pointing arm. A small, red-tipped object was floating down toward the bow of the *Rigel*. As they watched, a sheet of yellow flame shot out of the object, checking it's descent almost completely and it came to rest gently on the hull of the ship.

"Let's get over there," shouted Moran.

"Wait," ordered Barnes; "it may be dangerous. Let's see what happens next." By this time, the crew of men had stopped working and were staring curiously at the glowing object on the bow. Suddenly, the light on the object went out and, for a moment, nothing happened. Barnes and Morgan moved closer, their hands gripping drawn blasters.

Then a small door opened from the side of the object and what appeared to be a string of insects filed out. They crawled slowly over the hull of the *Rigel*, spreading out in all directions as Barnes and Moran stared in amazement. Finally, the captain found his voice.

"Well, I'll be damned," he breathed in wonder. "That thing's a space ship."

"And those are intelligent beings

coming out of it," muttered Moran. "They must be."

"Look," exclaimed Barnes. "What are they doing now?" The tiny creatures had brought out a pole of some kind and were hauling up a wee bit of material. They all stood stiffly at attention as the ceremony went on and at the end, one of their number drew apart and apparently addressed them. Then they broke up and scattered about again.

"If I didn't know better," blurted Barnes, "I'd say that they were claiming the ship as their own."

"Sure, that's it," echoed Moran; "why I'll bet they think it's a new planet. It's big enough to be, for them. Let's get a little closer."

The two men moved up cautiously, keeping themselves behind the cover of the forward tube housing. They watched as the tiny creatures set up a camp by their miniature space ship and formed exploration parties. The ranging groups travelled about a hundred feet on every direction, set up markers and returned to their ship. Inside the camp, the creatures were setting up minute machines for some purpose of their own.

"So, what now?" asked Moran, after five minutes of absorbed watching.

"Let them stay there," answered Barnes; "they're not doing any harm. Then, when we get the ship fixed, we'll think of something else."

"Well, whatever we do, we can't hurt them," observed Moran. "Galactic law is definite on that. All intelligent life is to be left to develop by itself. Under no circumstances will any offensive action be taken against alien life forms without consultation of the council. I'm quoting."

"You're damned good too," said Barnes, wryly. "You missed your calling. You should have been a space lawyer. Well, come on inside. If these midgets are so smart, they must have radio. And maybe, we can establish contact."

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FIFTEEN minutes later, Barnes and Moran, together with the ship's language expert, Crane, were sitting nervously around the radio set, from which was issuing the strangest sounds they had ever heard. The sounds consisted of sequences of rising squeaks mixed with underlying hisses and clicks. And the net effect was weird enough to make any man's nerves raw.

"Well, can you make anything out of it?" asked Barnes, finally.

"Something," grunted Crane. "It's similar to the languages of the Bettel system. I don't think the clicks and hisses mean anything; they're just plysical noises. It's the squealing that carries meaning."

"I don't know how that fellow does it," said Moran, admiringly. "This sounds like the wildest gibberish to me."

"Well, it isn't so difficult," said Crane. "There are just so many combinations of sounds that can be made and similarities are bound to occur."

"Never mind the semantic discussion," snapped Barnes. "Can you get an idea of what they're saying?"

"More or less," declared Crane. "Somebody in the ship is giving orders to the ones outside. He's telling them to hurry it up. Then, the ones outside are making reports about how operations are going."

"What operations are they talking about?" demanded Barnes.

"I don't know," replied Crane. "It seems to have something to do with machines they're setting up. They're getting ready to use them in some way."

"Oh, fine," remarked Barnes. "They've found a home and now they're going to live. Lord knows what they have in mind."

"Let's try to contact them," suggested Moran. "Think you could talk to them, Crane?"

"Probably," smiled the language expert. "Although with an accent."

He reached for the transmitter switch and hell broke loose. Alarm

bells began to clamor throughout the ship and automatic airlocks slammed. "What's going on?" yelled Crane, pulling his hand back.

"The hull!" shouted Moran. "Look at the hull temperature gauge. Those midgets are burning a hole through it."

"Get on your spacesuits," ordered Barnes. "And bring blasters; we're going to put an end to this right now."

"Wait a minute," yelled Moran. "Those creatures don't know what they're doing. They think this is a planet, remember? They're probably mining the hull; we can't kill them for that."

Barnes hesitated in indecision. "All right," he said, finally. "They can't do too much damage. Get on that radio, Crane, and tell them to stop."

CRANE switched on the transmitter and cleared his throat. Then he uttered a few hoarse squeals. The noise from the receiver died down and then rose up again into furious racket. Crane continued methodically and then stopped. From the receiver came a series of sharp noises.

"They want to know who we are," said Crane. "They say this is their planet and whoever we are, we'll just have to move."

"Tell them this is our ship," said Barnes, "and we're going to keep it. Tell them, this is not a planet but a spaceship."

Crane relayed the information and smiled at the answer.

"They say we're crazy. Or else, we're trying to fool them, and clumsily at that. They say they'll give us ten kopeks, however long that is, to get off and then they're going to hunt us down and kill us. I think they've got us mixed up with a rival of theirs. That's all they're saying for now."

"Great," exclaimed Barnes. "We can't hurt them and we can't run away from them; what does Galactic Law say about a situation like this, Moran?"

The navigator made a wry face. "We could kill them in self defense," he replied; "but only as a last resort. And even then, we'd have a lot of explaining to do when we got back."

"I know," agreed Barnes, sadly. "I once conked a Rigelian with a rock for shooting arrows at me and I never heard the end of it."

"Look—maybe we can scare these fellows off," suggested Moran. "Suppose I go out there in a spacesuit and walk around. Maybe, when they see the size of me, they'll tuck tail and run."

"Could be," agreed Barnes. "Try it, but be careful. If they can burn holes in the hull, they've probably got some pretty deadly weapons."

"Don't worry," said Moran. "I'll give those dwarfs a scare they'll never forget."

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Fifteen minutes later, Moran was back. His spacesuit had been nearly burned through in a dozen places and, as he struggled out of it, Barnes and Crane could see the strain on his face.

"Those damned midgets nearly killed me," he blurted. "I just got back to cover in time. Another second..." He lit a cigarette with shaky hands.

"Well, they've got guts," observed Barnes, drily. "That only makes our problem tougher."

"They've started mining again," remarked Crane, as the temperature gauge needle jumped. "If they keep it up much longer, they'll hit air."

"I say blast them," declared Moran, savagely. "They're a menace to the safety of the ship." His face was just beginning to get its color back but his hands still shook.

"We might have to do that and the hell with Galactic Law," remarked Barnes. "But I'm getting to like the little devils; anyone who would stand up to a big ape like Moran here deserves a chance. What do you say, Moran?"

"I don't think it's funny," muttered Moran. "Those little—"

"Well, as I see it," interrupted Crane, "it's either us or them." He was staring at the hull temperature gauge in fascination. "And I'd much rather have it be them than us. Sure, we can seal off that compartment they're burning into. The automatic doors have done that already. But what's going to stop them from doing it someplace else? I'm with Moran. Blast them."

"We could set up an energy ray on the ship's stern and blow them to pieces," suggested Moran. "Simple as rolling off an asteroid."

"Look, I've got a better idea," said Barnes. "The overdrive controls are out for a while but we've still got the landing jets. I'm going to pull that repair crew in and fire up the jets." He reached for the communicator.

"Are you thinking of shaking them off?" asked Moran, incredulously. "That'll never work. Why—"

"Patience, my boy," said Barnes, gently. "The one thing a budding space lawyer has to have is patience. Man your stations." He ordered the repair crew inside and waited while Moran fumed angrily around the control cabin.

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A FEW MINUTES later, he cut in both forward and rear jets, playing them so that they counteracted each other almost completely. The ship began to vibrate under the opposing thrusts and soon, the men's teeth were chattering uncontrollably. He continued the operation until the glassite on the gauges was cracking and then eased off the jets.

"What are you doing?" demanded Moran.

"Figure it out by yourself," answered Barnes, grinning. "A space lawyer should have initiative and ingenuity, my boy. Lots of competition in the field, you know."

He cut in the jets again and the ship began to vibrate like a fixed leaf in the wind. He kept it up until he thought the ship would fly apart and then cut off the jets. Smilingly, he turned to the navigator. "Now, my boy, let's climb into spacesuits and go for a walk. I think we'll see something interesting."

Outside, on the hull of the ship, they approached the tiny creatures' camp cautiously. Moran inhaled sharply in surprise at what they saw. The little aliens were hurrying toward their ship. As they watched, the last one entered and the port slid shut. In a moment, a sheet of flame shot out of the miniature space ship and it rose gently away from the hull. It accelerated sharply and, in seconds, the red glow of its jets waned into nothingness in the void. Barnes turned to his navigator and laughed.

"Get it yet? We couldn't shake them off; I was pretty sure of that. If they have space ships, they certainly must have magnetic grapplers. We had to fix it so they'd leave of their own accord."

"So?" asked Moran in bewilderment.

"So, I fixed it so that their new planet would be useless to them. The jets caused vibration to us but were earthquakes to them. And a planet with violent earthquakes is useless to anybody. So they decided to pack up and leave instead of hanging around wasting their time."

Moran grinned broadly. "Captain, you're a pure genius," he marvelled. "This beats anything I ever heard for getting around the law. Let me congratulate you, legally that is."

"It was nothing," said Barnes, modestly. "I've been getting around the Law of Gravitation for years." They laughed together and went out to survey the repair work on their planet.

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COMING NEXT ISSUE
EQUATIONS FOR DESTINY
by John Berryman



Readin' and Writhin'

Publishers are requested not to send fantasy selections to this department, as the volume of science-fiction books fully occupies the reviewer's time and space.

WHEN AN author wants to say something about the times and the milieu in which he lives, but say it within the confines of a compelling story, there are three good approaches. One is to write a satirical story in a present-day setting; another is to write a "historical" work; the third is to write a science-fiction story, and project his commentary into space-time. If he wants to deal with historical forces as such, the second and third categories offer the most leeway.

The best historical novels, of course, are those which deal with the facts of the past, as well as we know these facts. While many good novels have taken liberties for the sake of the story, the practice is not a commendable one, it seems to me. There should be enough leeway within the gaps of the records to allow for as much liberty of expression and characterization as any author wants; he is always free to use his own "John Doe" of any period as he likes —so long as "John Doe" behaves in a manner consistent with the times—but actual historical personages shouldn't be tampered with, where the record is definite.

What then are the limitations of the historical novel? First of all, generally speaking, we *know* what happened, and did not happen, to the famous men and women. But our knowledge and understanding of *how* and *why* it happened is incomplete, usually much more incomplete than the record. Here is where the novelist has a rather free hand. But he *is* limited again in a more subtle way; the actual record shows fantastic coincidences, seemingly impossible sequences of event without discernible cause, happy endings and melodramatic tragedies, gods from machines—a plethora of events which simply would not "go" in fiction. In fact, men and women are too frequently the *objects* of forces and events beyond their control or knowledge; in fiction, we demand a semblance of order and rationality. We want to feel that the characters in stories *can* shape their destinies, and that a *direct*, usually one-to-one, relationship can be found between their activities and what happens in result.

In fiction, an intricate military campaign shouldn't be allowed to fall to pieces simply because a clerk, anxious to get away for the weekend, stuck a letter into a pigeon-hole in his desk and then forgot about it. In fact, that is just what happened with the famous Burgoyne campaign during our revolutionary war. Sir William Lord Howe, who was supposed to assist General Burgoyne in the plan to split off the northern and southern colonies—which would and should have been a most effective one—never received the detailed instructions of what he was expected to do. In fact, he knew little or nothing about it, until it was too late.

Now, in some such cases an author can explore the intricate human relationships and psychological forces behind seemingly implausible events and actions, and thus, for the sake of the story, come forth with a convincingly worked-out account of why a certain outre-sounding series of events took place. In too many cases, however, the business is too much of a cliche to use in fiction—unless the story-line, as such, doesn't hang on it. A novel about Burgoyne probably wouldn't employ this above-mentioned fact as a dramatic climax; we know this happened, so the novel would deal with the other events and with Burgoyne

and Lord Howe themselves, etc.

In the science-fiction novel, the history of times to come, we don't find these restrictions. The author is omniscient, he can make events follow a logical pattern, and the success of the story depends upon how sound his pattern seems, and on the way he handles people and situations involved. He can evolve a philosophy of history based upon the records of the past, and project this into the future; he can use this to explain events of the past, while in the process of exploring the future; or he can take some already-formulated "pattern" of history—such as those evolved by Spengler, Toynbee, and others—and project this into tomorrow and tomorrow. In so doing, he will be stating his own opinions and feelings about the times in which he lives, for anyone's feelings about the past, today, are a reflection of what they feel about their own times. Even when one tries to recapture the feelings of an earlier time and re-express them, such feelings are translations, colored by the emotional and cultural language of the author's own milieu.

Numerous science-fiction authors have tried their hand at "historical" science-fiction stories, and the most skillful have attempted to evolve some sort of historical theory as a guide-line. And one of the most skillful of these is Isaac Asimov, whose theory of psycho-history is formulated in his series of "Foundation" stories.

In Asimov's series—this is a collection of six stories in sequence, the first five having appeared in *Astounding Science Fiction* under the titles of "Foundation", "Bridle and Saddle", "The Wedge", and "The Big and the Little"; an introductory story has been added—psycho-history is a science, in that certain historical tendencies and effects are measurable, predictable, and repeatable. Each story is complete in itself, and while there is some over-lapping of characters, there is no principal "hero".

Asimov's theory in itself is fascinating, and he employs it with convincing adeptness, as well as telling a believable story, once you accept the basic premises of each situation. The stories are mainly concerned with rational action, in that the efforts of the principal characters are rational, or revealed as irrational. That is, their aims, first of all, are possible under the given circumstances; they have the means of achieving their aims, and their actions are appropriate to the achievement of these aims.

(The first requisite test of rational action is a rational aim; and an aim, no matter how desirable cannot be considered as rational if the circumstances rule out its possibility, either absolutely—rare—or at the time of the aim—frequent. If I seriously decide to determine, now, whether a spaceship can travel faster than light, my aim is irrational: *space-ships do not exist now.* If my aim is to go to the moon, it can be considered rational on the basis of possibility. However, if I decide to go to the moon on February 28th, 1952, my plan is irrational, since I have no means of achieving such an aim, even though it may not prove impossible for someone else to make a moon-flight on that date. And if, given that the means is there, I get into a balloon with my lunchbox and a change of socks, my action is still irrational, since it is inappropriate for the realization of my aim.)

Thus, I heartily recommend Gnome Press for their fine edition of an excellent book. "Foundation" is well worth $2.75.

SIMILAR skill and thoughtfulness in presentation is to be found in Asimov's "I, Robot", a collection of short stories dealing with various and sundry mechanical characters, originally appearing in *Astounding Science Fiction* and *Super Science Stories*. They are loosely, but convincingly connected, through the character of the woman who devoted her life to robots and robotrics.

The fundamental laws of robotrics are: (1) A robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. (2) A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law. (3) A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law. These rules are built into the mechanisms, and this allows for innumerable fascinating situations, which are dealt with in delightful detail.

There is, for example, the robot who finds the existence of human beings, as they explain it to him, illogical and formulates his own cosmology and rationale ("Reason"); the robot who wants to please everyone, so tells people what it knows they want to hear ("Liar"); the robot who became a practical joker ("Escape"), and many others. It's all a far, far cry from the old-fashioned robots of the Ray Cummings type, which became Frankenstein monsters and tried to wipe out humanity. Gnome Press has earned the $2.50 they ask for it.

IN "The Stars Like Dust", Doubleday's offering in the Asimov list, you will find something of the historical projection which appears in "Foundation", although on a smaller scale, and to a lesser degree. It's a minor work, but a good story, and thoroughly enjoyable. One thing though: I would be remiss in my duty if I did not warn those readers who are familiar with the full "Foundation" series that both the problem and its solution will be familiar to them—but I'm not enough of a goop to tell you which story had it first. If, then, you have the above two books, and would like some more Asimov, this one is worth adding to the list, and $2.50 isn't exorbitant for it.

RWL

FOUNTAIN OF DEATH

By Joseph Farrell

BRAD HARTMAN brought his spaceship to a landing in the clearing and studied with distaste the fungus-like vegetation of Titania. He turned and caught Art Julian staring nervously out.

"Stop shivering," he growled. "The Patrol comes here only once a year, and they've just made their visit. This planet is forbidden—there won't be anybody to butt into our work."

He started pulling on his heavy clothes and reached for his gun belt. "Come on," he insisted; "we have work to do."

The other man hesitated. "I dunno, Brad. There's something about this set-up I don't like; it's too easy. Why ain't somebody tried it before? Or—have they?"

Hartman put his hands on his belt and glared disgustedly, in undisguised contempt. "Look, Julian. Not many people know what's here—the story's been hushed up to prevent a wholesale stampede to Titania." He laughed shortly, a cynical little noise. "What do you think would happen if the whole world knew that the secret of immortality was on this out-of-the-way moon?"

"Everybody knows it," said Julian, unconvinced; "everybody knows the Rojis are immortal."

Hartman's lips curled, and he continued to regard his companion while he buckled his gun belt. He reached for the weathered log book on the chart table. "Has everybody read this?" he demanded. "The log book of the first expedition to Titania, wrecked and floating around in space for a hundred years. We found that by sheer luck, you can be sure the scientists have rediscovered the secret, but they haven't spread the word."

He put down the book and slammed it with a triumphant fist. "We know that the immortality of the Rojis can be had by humans! That some of the original party took advantage of it!"

Julian began reluctantly to pull on his warm togs, glancing again at the bleak scene outside their ship. He pulled on his gun-belt, first checking the loads of his two therma-guns. Each

It was a priceless secret, and Hartman and his partner meant to have it at any cost. But Hartman should have been suspicious when the natives agreed to give them what they demanded so rapidly.



He was shrinking . . .

of the two heavy weapons held twelve charges of a lead alloy that left the barrel in molten form—one of the most efficient instruments of death ever designed by the human mind. He shoved them into their holsters and stood staring at Hartman for a moment.

"You forget," he said slowly, "that the log book spoke of those two men as if they'd never left Titania; and that most of the entry was unreadable, spoiled by the explosion that wrecked their ship. We don't know the whole story."

Hartman had been checking his own weapons. He shoved them into their holsters and faced Julian with an exasperated expression. "Give your yellow streak a rest," he advised, levelly; "I'll undergo the treatment first."

Deliberately, he turned his back on Julian, adding to himself that the other man needn't take the treatment at all. He was sick of Julian's increasing cowardice, which was becoming

One thing which seekers after immortality usually seem to forget is that, if they find it, they're stuck with it—the process probably won't be reversible.

very dangerous after several recent clashes with the law. With the secret of immortality at his command, he could well afford to hide out until he had been forgotten. Then—

Pulling open the heavy spacelock, he chuckled, glancing back at his companion. "Funny, the fountain of youth being way out here in space. Old Ponce de Leon would have been surprised if he'd known he was looking on the wrong planet. I never thought I'd be Ponce de Leon of the twenty-fourth century!"

"Seems to me," Julian murmured, "that Ponce de Leon found death, not life."

THEY STEPPED into the frigid atmosphere of Titania. The air was bitter cold, but breathable after they let it filter through the heavy parkas that shielded their faces. A mild wind struck them as Hartman led the way toward a break in the wall of gray vegetation.

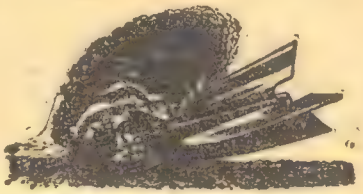
A path led into a jungle of squat grayish plants that seemed to move restlessly as they passed. Hartman eyed them suspiciously—they were more like toadstools than honest plants, and he remembered vaguely that this was a world without clorophyll.

A terrified scream from behind made him whirl, drawing his gun. Then he laughed heartily; one of the mobile plants had ambitiously wrapped itself around Julian's ankle. Hartman kicked out with his heavy boots and smashed the plant.

Julian straightened up sheepishly and they marched forward again. After a while Hartman stopped and pointed. "There it is—the native city mentioned in the log. So far, we've been successful." He kicked aside a few tendrils that had been exploring his legs and motioned Julian forward. "Come on."

They had seen only the steeple-like top of a building, but shortly the jungle ended and they found themselves in a cleared area, where a conglomeration of native huts were gathered into a city. Most of the dwellings seemed to be of a sort of stucco, and were roughly made; but some, surprisingly, showed an artistry of construction and a knowledge of architecture. A few hundred yards ahead, in the center of the city, towered the structure whose spire they had seen from afar.

IT WAS A spacious structure of stone, reminiscent of a medieval castle. Reaching more than a hundred



feet into the air, it was a solid indication that these people were, or at one time had been, reasonably civilized.

Had been, Hartman decided, studying the indolent specimens who lounged about the town, for the most part concerned in exposing their bodies to the feeble sun of Titania. The Rojis were tiny creatures not more than three feet in height, sad-eyed, and incredibly fragile. The few who were moving about supported themselves on legs so slender that they would have been worthless in any gravity stronger than this tiny moon's. Hartman sneered.

"And these are the immortal beings of Titania," he grunted, "if we can't shake the secret out of them, we deserve to die young!"

He singled out a group that looked more intelligent and energetic than the average. "You there," he called. "do any of you talk English?"

"How could they?" Julian asked.

"They deal with the Patrol, don't they? Only one ship a year, but they have to talk. How about it, you?"

"I talk English," said one of the Rojis, separating himself from the group; "you are from the Patrol?"

"Yeah, a special job. Take me to your king."

The Roji gazed at Hartman with no apparent emotion. The creature

couldn't have weighed more than twenty pounds by Earth standards. He made no move to obey until Hartman growled softly and let his fingers brush the butts of his therma-guns. Then he gave one last, searching stare and started walking in the direction of the large building in the town's center.

The two men walked side by side behind the being. Hartman kept his eyes straight ahead, but from the edges of his vision he saw that their parade was attracting much curiosity; and some of the Rojis were starting to trail along after them.

"Pay them no attention," he growled softly to Julian. "They can't harm us—we could mop up the lot of them with our bare hands. They're even feebler than I'd expected."

But he was glad when they reached the palace. A large crowd had gathered, and there was a low murmur of Roji voices. Their guide hesitated at the entrance, but Hartman prodded him on. The doors were large enough for the men to go through; they must have been huge for the tiny natives. Hartman looked coldly at the creatures behind them, and followed after his native guide.

Inside the door, he nodded to Julian, who stayed there to guard their rear. Hartman followed the native down a long corridor.

Once again they stopped before a large door. Hartman, remembering the description in the log book, knew it to be the chamber of the king. There were no guards—evidently such was considered unnecessary. Hartman reached over the Rojis head and pushed the door open. He shoved the guide through and pushed him ahead of him to where an even more delicate appearing Roji with eyes that seemed older than humanity gazed at them from a simple throne.

"Tell the king," said Hartman, wasting no time, "that we want the secret of immortality."

But the services of the translator were not needed.

"I speak English," said the king, softly. "I have dealt with the members of the English-speaking world since the days of the Ross expedition."

HARTLEY was startled for a moment at the mention of the American explorer of a century ago, whose wrecked ship he and Julian had found. But, of course—these Rojis were immortal.

He grunted and looked back through the door to where Julian was standing guard at the end of the corridor. He threw back his parka, uncovering his face to the slightly less frigid air of the palace, and ran a gloved hand over the bristle of his jaw. "We've come," he said, "to ask you to make us immortal."

The king regarded him noncomittally. "We are Roji; you are human," was the reply.

"We know your immortality is artificial," Hartman retorted. "And we know the process is simple and can be used on humans—don't try to tell us anything else. I'd like to bet that those scientists who know the secret are taking advantage of it. They're not passing up a chance like that—they're being treated, and not saying anything about it."

The king made a tiny motion that might have been a shrug. His eyes were unreadable. "It is hard to keep a secret," he admitted. "But, as your people say, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. I will not make you and your friend immortal."

"We can pay you well."

Another shrug. "We have all we need. One ship a year from Earth is enough to carry the few products for which we wish to exchange our own wares. Wealth, as you know it, has no meaning here."

"What price?" Hartman asked.

The king shook his little head and turned away in a gesture that said plainly he considered the interview over. Hartman abandoned diplomacy. He pulled out a therma-gun and pointed it at the Roji monarch.

"Do you know what this is?" When the king nodded, he went on: "My partner has two of these. He's going to hold them both pointed at you while I'm being given the treatment for immortality. We know that your people won't take a chance on your being killed. And—no tricks, because we won't hesitate to use our guns."

The king seemed unimpressed. "As I said before, a little knowledge can be very dangerous. Immortality would not suit you; it is not as great a blessing as you think."

"Why? Is it because eternal life becomes tiresome?"

"That," said the king, "is part of it."

"But you always can end your own life, can't you?" Hartman asked, masking his face against the sudden alarm he felt. Suppose his therma-guns were useless against this immortal creature? But the king's answer reassured him.

"We can die—yes. Our lives can be extinguished by sufficient violence. Suicide is difficult, though; the will to live is increased far beyond nature's normal instinct of self-preservation. But that is only a small part of it...

"What else?"

THE KING raised a tiny eyebrow and looked Hartman over with a faint show of amusement. The first laugh Hartman had heard from a Roji throat was as short and cynical as his own. He felt a faint uneasiness; this being had been old and wise before the first rocket had reached the moon—but the king only laughed again, softly.

"You have come with a gun in your hand... I do not choose to have you use it on me, nor would my people risk any violence to my person. You shall join the brotherhood of the immortals, as you request. But—it is not necessary that I answer the questions of a gunman."

Hartman's grip on the therma-gun tightened. Anger struggled with greed for a moment, but he relaxed, and even felt a grudging admiration for the courage of the tiny, pipe-stemmed creature.

"We understand each other then," he said. "Now, let's waste no time. What is this treatment? What's its principle?"

"The treatment is based on the fact that all body cells do not age at the same rate. In fact, some cells have such great rejuvenating powers that, if they alone composed the body, there would be no death. Normally, these cells are carried along into old age like good apples in a barrel with rotten ones."

Hartman peered through narrowed eyes. "Seems to me I've heard of something like that before—what's the answer?"

"Radiation. You people of Earth have known for a long time that different types of cells are affected in varying degrees by various types of hard radiation. Cancer cells, for instance, dissolve more rapidly under radiation than normal cells. Your Earth doctors used these rays long ago for curing certain types of cancer. Then they discovered Radine, the drug that built up resistance of the normal cells, and discovered the more selective rays which eventually wiped out the cancer menace."

The king shook his head. "Your scientists are likely to stumble on our secret if they continue that line of research. It would be bad for Earth if they released that secret. Bad for the race..."

Remembering the listless Rojis he had seen, Hartman nodded. Bad for the race, yes. But—not bad for the right kind of individual. He waved his gun impatiently. "How long will it take you to treat me?"

"Only a few hours—our method is fast and simple. We'll start for the science building now, if you wish."

HARTMAN fondled his unshaven chin, watching the king narrowly. But there could be no trickery when he and Julian held the guns—He glanced back toward his companion, then waved his gun toward the

Roji who had guided them to the palace.

"You'll come out with us," he told the king. "And have this fellow go out first and tell the people what's what; make sure they understand that if anybody tries anything, you'll get it first."

"You will receive the treatment as promised," said the king. Turning to the other Roji, he sang out a few sentences in their lilting, poetic tongue. The Roji glanced once more at Hartman, and led the way out. A brief explanation to Julian, and they all left the palace.

They waited at the palace entrance while the Roji who had first guided them chattered in the native sing-song to the hundreds of fragile beings who now filled the square before them. A low, disapproving murmur began to grow. Hartman pushed his gun an inch closer to the king.

But there was no trouble. The king stepped forward a few paces and raised his hands; he spoke a few words and the murmur subsided. The crowd started to disperse.



Their original guide was dismissed and the three of them made their way through the city, the king between the two of them, closely watched by both.

"Any trouble and you'll get a load of this," Hartman promised, waving the therma-gun. "Can't you walk any faster?"

The tiny Roji king looked with amusement up at Hartman. His little face was surprisingly manlike, though the features were distortions of human anatomy. One small eyebrow was lifted sardonically in an unvoiced reply to the question. Hartman grunted, oddly embarrassed for having made such a foolish remark. He resigned himself to the snail's pace that was the best the three foot tall native could manage.

At least it gave him time to look over the city. A few hundred yards away, at the edge of town, was a rather large building toward which they were walking—the science building. On one side was a six foot high wall that enclosed perhaps an acre of land. He hadn't taken time to notice this before, but the sight of pacing Rojis at intervals along the top of the wall aroused his curiosity.

"Hold it a minute," he ordered. "Keep your gun on this midget, Julian."

He found something to stand on, and looked over the wall. A startled cry escaped his lips. Inside the enclosure was a deep pit. Several dozen Rojis, working in gangs, presided over by other Rojis with spears, were engaged in what appeared to be slave labor. He puzzled for a moment over their activity. Some were carving heavy blocks of stone from the bedrock in which they labored; others were lugging the blocks to higher ground, from where they were dragged out of a gate by still more workers. All under the supervision of alert guards.

He turned and looked at the king, who shook his head with an air of sadness. "Even here we have—criminals." The Roji leader accented the last word slightly, looking straight at Hartman. "That is a prison. We make the most of the situation by using the labor of those men to construct new buildings. Slow work, but—we have all the time we want."

Hartman chuckled. "That's a good one. You little monkeys putting each other in jail! But lead on—we've wasted enough time already."

●

THE GRAPEVINE seemed to be another Earth custom that flourished on Titania, for all evidence showed that they had been expected at the science building. A committee was on hand to welcome the king. Much to Hartman's disgust, the na-

tives bowed reverently before the king, played his therma-gun angrily.

"Tell them what we're after, Shorty," he snapped. "We want to get this over with."

"Come." The king motioned him forward. "Pardon our slowness—remember that we're not accustomed to hurrying. We have time...as you will have."

They were led through great stone halls into the interior of the building. In side rooms, Roji scientists worked at their strange, unearthly specialties. Science here seemed to be mainly biochemical—there were no noisy machines; in fact, Hartman saw no mechanical devices worth mentioning—

Until they entered the room that seemed to be the end of their quest. There was a big machine there, a thing that seemed as ancient as the planet. He studied it briefly. It consisted mainly of a thick black tube that descended from the ceiling, and was fitted with an adjustable lens-disc. He surmised that it was the ray projector.

In the center of the room, a few Roji scientists were gathered about a vat that was probably seven feet long and deep enough to submerge a man. This tub contained an ill smelling green liquid.

One of the scientists looked up impatiently. Wasting no time, he addressed Hartman: "You're going first? Come, take off your clothing while our solutions are fresh."

Hartman hesitated. He glanced at the king. "How does this work? What's in the bath tub?"

"Your immortality," the king answered. "A liquid that absorbs the unwanted cells as the rays dissolve them. You will be given injections that reduce the speed of your bodily process to zero, and—"

"No you don't!" Hartman roared. "What kind of double talk is that—reduce my bodily process to zero—!"

The king raised a hand, and he was a tiny bundle of dignity. "I should have said 'almost zero'. Your body must be in a state of suspended animation while the rays do their work. There is no danger involved, we have never lost a patient."

HARTMAN felt his first real doubts, staring at the green fluid in the vat. His mind raced for a second looking for a trick...but it all seemed logical enough. And Julian would be holding a gun on the king while he himself was helpless in the tub.

He caught Julian's knees starting to quiver, and gave the man a hard, meaningful look.

"All right," he growled. "But don't forget—if anything happens to me, your king dies!"

He passed his guns over to Julian, who stood with his back to the wall, standing guard over the little king. Then he stripped off his clothes, shivering a little. The Rojis seemed unmindful og the temperature, but had heated the room somewhat.

For a few minutes the scientists were busy pricking his skin with needles. A weakness began to gather in him, and he staggered a little as he made his way to the tub.

When he started to slip, several of the little people supported him so he would not fall too swiftly. His weight must have been tremendous to them, and he could see them straining to keep him steady. The thought amused his wandering mind in the growing blackness, and he laughed foolishly.

Then the cataleptic fluids in his blood stream took hold. His last sight before he blacked out was the face of the king, with its sardonic half-smile...

●

Little fuzzy hands were clutching at him, drawing him from a slimy liquid grave. He struggled feebly, until he realized they were helping him. Though his life-force was weak, he knew vaguely what was happening, and he let the fuzzy hands slide needles through his skin.

The needles brought returning life and strength. For a time he sat on the edge of the vat, panting and dazed,

with the world screaming in his ears.

When he looked up, he saw that the screaming was Julian's; the man was backed against the wall, staring in utter horror at Hartman.

Hartman slid off the edge of the vat. It seemed a long way to the floor, but he was feeling the thrill of increased vitality as the hypos took effect. There was a strange feeling of lightness, and a vague ringing in his ears from the rays, but he had control of his mind.

"Your turn," he told Julian walking toward the man and reaching out for his guns. He took one of them and was amazed at its weight. The gun felt like a cannon in his hand, and he almost dropped it.

"No, no!" Julian shrieked. "You're glowing like—like radium, and you've shrunk, and—"

Hartman frowned, struggling with the gun. Julian did look taller. But there was no room for that thought in Hartman's mind: All the months he had hated Julian came suddenly to a head. He snarled in hatred, and pointed the weapon at his confederate.

"Don't!" Julian gasped. His voice mounted to a scream. "No, Hartman—no, Brad! Don't..."

Hartman strained at the trigger. He was weaker than he had thought, though he felt as strong as ever. "I've had enough of you, Julian. I won't spend eternity with you. In plain self defense, I have to do this. One of these days your weakness will get you in trouble, and me with you—"

The therma-gun exploded in his hands. Julian's face became frozen grimace of agony. He clutched for a few seconds at his stomach and then fell to the floor.

HARTMAN studied the body for a moment, then turned to the Rojis, who had been watching in surprise. He shifted the gun into his left hand. A sudden fear and a feeling of being utterly alone siezed him.

Already he was sorry for having killed his ally, for Julian had been right—he *was* smaller, and his body was glowing as if radioactive. "What's the matter with me?" he demanded.

The king glanced with his cynical smile at the scientists and faced Hartman. "The glow will disappear in a few hours."

There was no trace of friendliness in the king's eyes.

"The human race is old, Hartman. Long before Egypt began, there were civilizations on Earth. One of those civilizations developed space travel, and the same one discovered the secret of immortality. The two secrets went hand in hand, Hartman, Immortality could not be had for men on their home planet."

Hartman stared, fascinated, at the tiny king who had somehow grown much larger. The Roji was only a little shorter than himself. An alarm bell was ringing in his mind—and a suspicion of the truth. He was silent as the king went on.

"I told you that the ray baths dissolved the undesirable cells. Naturally, a human body becomes much smaller when most of it is washed away. Smaller—and far too weak to exist in the immense gravity of Earth. A smaller world is needed, Hartman."

The king paused, then said simply: "We are as human as you are, Hartman."

Hartman reeled as the final truth was disclosed. The gun was a tremendous weight in his tiny hands, but the king was not finished.

"Those of us who chose immortality came to Titania. There were far too many of us, and mostly of the leader class. Our civilization on Earth collapsed. We were isolated from the human race of Earth for some 80,000 years, until men of your civilization came. We have had much time to reflect on the shortcomings of Titania.

"And now, Hartman, you must pay the price for your conduct. And—" he gestured toward Julian's body "—for murder. You have laughed at our prison—you will have much time to become acquainted with it—"

"No!" Hartman shouted. "You can't hold me!"

HIS GUN roared. The king staggered and a small hole appeared in his shoulder. He fell back against the wall and clutched at his wound. He spoke through the agonized mask of his face. "You'll need more than that to kill me, Hartman. Remember that my body—and yours—is composed of the hardest cells; I'll recover fast." Take him."

Hartman managed to fire two more shots and dropped the gun. His ship was in the clearing...if he could first escape from the building. He plunged for the door, sidestepped advancing Rojis, and was in the corridor. More of the beings blocked his way. He struck out wildly, and somehow he was past them, and saw the daylight through the outer door ahead.

He made it to the jungle, panting. from exertion and from fear. Not fear for his life so much as instinctive fear of the unknown—fear of his own alien body. But in his spaceship he could drift in space for as long as he wanted, and think things out. It might not be so bad—he had lost his human form, but he could gather other men, forced the Rojis to treat them, take over this colony or start a new one with himself as boss...

Something caught his ankle in the jungle path, and he sprawled headlong. He struggled to his feet and started forward again. Once more something tripped him. He was horrified to find that the fungus-like jungle plants were winding tendrils around him.

No longer small plants to be laughed at, and casually pushed aside! Powerful creepers wrapped about his tiny ankles, slithered for his throat. He screamed hoarsely and fought his way clear. But there were more of the things; every time he escaped one, it seemed that two more took its place.

He was still screaming when the Rojis, cautiously chopping their way through the jungle, reached him.

TODAY AND TOMORROW

This issue of *Future* is unique in at least one respect: we have *two* cover stories! "Devil's Cargo" contains the scene you see done by the hand of Virgil Finlay on our frontespiece, and "The Tinkerer" is the cover story for the last issue. Our apologies again for it's having been crowded out, and we hope you'll find it worth the waiting. And if you want to see more Finlay covers, let's hear from you!

Usually, you'll find editorial pages filled with examples cited by the editor of how right he was about this story, that cover, the other policy, etc.; and I'm not afraid to crow a bit when it turns out that I made a really good guess. However, here's one time where I was really wrong, and the early votes didn't show it; the returns, within the two-month period after calling for your reactions to our policy of paying for the letters published in "Down to Earth", were definitely favorable. But —votes kept on coming in, and they're still coming in. And the upstate returns showed me wrong; no matter how I put it, the fans felt that paying for letters put letter-writing on a commercial basis, and most of them would rather not—most of those who have been writing in, I mean. So be it; we'll play it your way.

The May issue starts a series of novelets by Wallace West, about the great legend—or, should we say, the origin of the great legends. Since no one knows for sure that beings from another world *didn't* colonize Earth, millennia ago, it makes fair enough grounds for fiction. Mr. West has worked out some ingenious "explanations" for the sources of many mythologies, but neither he nor I are under any delusion about them. *The series of stories is not being presented as a revelation of cosmic secrets and truth.* We leave such sport to the various cults.

The May book will also see the return of a very fine science-fiction author, one who has not appeared many times, but whose stories seem to have been remembered. I refer to John Berryman, whose novelet "Equations of Destiny" will be the second feature in our forthcoming issue.

Looking ahead to the July *Future*, we have what will be a pleasant surprise to those of you who have been complaining about the style of covers we use. The July issue *will* have a woman on the cover; but it will *not* otherwise resemble any other cover we've used, so far as the scene goes. I hope those of you who have been asking for a change will respond to the experiment.

RWL



Beautiful, Beautiful, Beautiful!

by Stuart Freidman

We hope you'll agree that this brief satire is delightful, delightful, delightful.

★ ★ ★

IT WAS THE eve of Progress-Stage Six, and the daily message had prescribed Stage Five Ecstacy Formula. Everyone, from 000 to 999, in Community Home 8051 for Pre-Mating Males in Progress-Stage Five, was experiencing the formula's balanced emotional heightening. Everyone, that is, except G17AZ(q):444,-801,735 category male, known familiarly as 735. 735 stood in a small, mirrored, harshly-lighted meditation chamber, cut off from the goodness of the Community Mind. Under the plasti-skin contours of his perfect features he felt a flush of shame on his own imperfect face; he couldn't master the formula.

All of the formula's ingredients, from basic joy in beauty through proportionally blended mastered emotions of lower progress-stages, were easy. Except the new one: anticipation of love adventure. 735 knew that, without this ingredient to propel him, he would not wish to leave Stage-Five. And not to wish to move beautifully onward would be...735 shuddered ...ugly!

Yesterday, he had voiced the courtship chant, saying: *Oh, daughter and mother of the gods, the beat of thy heart is the pulse in my veins. Wilt thou, O Chosen One G17AZq444,-801,735, category female, co-create the beauty of human life?* She, instead of chanting in turn: *Oh, son and father of the gods,* had said: "I'm 733, not 735."

A member of the Sublime Committee had remedied the error, and 735 had understood again the beauty of everything. The very fact that he couldn't tell one odd-numbered female from another, because of their equal perfection, was guarantee against the blemishes of desire and envy and possessiveness.

Tomorrow he must enter Stage Six if he did not want 735 category female to suffer delay in fulfillment. Of course he didn't want any such thing to happen to one whom he loved beautifully. He frowned sternly

at himself. Of course not! He shut his eyes and concentrated on feeling anticipation of love adventure. He tried it with his eyes open, thought of the selflessly dedicated career ahead of him in helping construct another wing on the temple of ageless imperishable beauty. He had a vision of an earthquake, but brief and hazy as it was it gave that balanced emotional heightening which was surely ecstacy formula.

He re-entered the great hall. Here was esthetic perfection, where tones of light merged with lines of architecture and waves of sound and pleasing odors. Each of his fellows was as flawless of feature as he, differing only in that odd numbers were blond, even brunette. The spiritual symphony of a thousand minds under the baton of Stage-Five ecstacy formula exalted 735, augmenting his small mind a thousandfold, transforming his ugly aloneness until he was One-All and beautiful again.

He stood, gazing out from a breadth of curving glass upon the vista. As distant as a dream, and with all a dream's wispy texture, stood Community Home 8051 for Pre-Mating Females in Progress-Stage Five, upon an eminence of the land similar to the Males' Home. He knew they were also experiencing ecstacy formula.

In the distance between, were the many buildings of the city, each a proud curve or angle or mass within the patterned whole. There were vast open greens, and areas of intricate floral lacework; some streets thrust, while others meandered, and there were pools and fountains. The dusk sky blending exquisite patterns of sun and cloud, thanks to the committee of artist-meteorologists for the zone was, as always, superb. 735 regarded a stand of dark evergreens forming an irregular counterbalancing mass, and the outlaw thought raced through his mind that he would like to have a portable sawmill.

HE SHIFTED his attention hastily to the contemplation of another aspect. Beyond the weather cone, he noted, it was storming. He kept staring, with an intensity which threatened the balance of his emotional heightening. He sensed that his mind was once more out of harmony, and feared that he would taint the whole. He stared fixedly at the dreamlike eminence upon which stood the female home and concentrated on anticipation of love adventure with 733 ...no! 735, category female.

Suddenly he was running. The violence of his motion left several of his fellows in a state of near collapse. He got out of the great hall, ran through the city. He reached the edge of the weather cone, paused, then rushed through. He stood in the raging downpour of the storm and shivered. He looked back at the indescribably magnificence of the world he had left, feeling like a pauper peering into a castle of yore. He burst out laughing.

He plunged on through the storm. The land was rough and ugly, and he tired quickly. The remedial hue had begun to fade from areas of his imperfectly-colored hair. His plasti-skin mask had begun to crinkle; he sank down and peeled the mask off.

Now he could never go back; he would have to be the abomination that was himself. He groaned, got up and trudged on, tired, dirty, hungry, and spiritually loathesome because he was mad as hell. He made the coarsest sort of brutish sounds in his throat. He was ashamed, and then he repeated the sounds and grinned.

735 stopped in his tracks. There was a small, smoky fire ahead. He moved stealthily toward it, and saw a

female kneeling beside it, hurling raucous, squalling imprecations at the fire. She twisted around and saw him. She had streaked hair, a dirty, off-balance face and a distinctly unpleasant expression. His heart began to slam, and he thought: *This is anticipation of love adventure.*

The female's scowl had vanished and she got to her feet and came to him.

"Who are you?" she said unpleasantly. She snuffed her nose and sneezed.

"I was once known to my fellows as 735, but—"

"Son and father of the gods!" She screeched offensively with laughter. "I'm 735, category female."

"My mate!" He shut his eyes and groaned. Then he peered narrowly at her. "She was beautiful; you're not her."

She was regarding him thoughtfully. "You're not him, either; you look more like an ogre."

"Long ago," he said dreamily, "I saw in a picture book the face of a woman called The Horror. I thought all dreams had already come true, and that I could never hope to find such a one. But here you are!"

"Do you really mean it?" she said, her eyes adoring. Then her voice broke excitedly. "Why, there's not a perfect feature to you!"

"We were made for each other! Look at us; we haven't sense enough to get in out of the rain!"

"I just know we'll make a mess of everything together."

"First we'll build a shelter—"

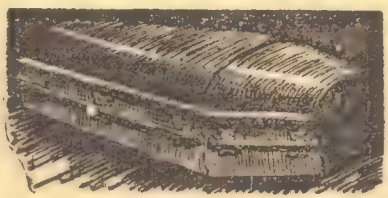
"No. A fire."

"You see?" he cried triumphantly. "Already we're out of harmony."

And, so saying, they built a house that fell down, a fire that flooded out, and discovered they had both been wrong in not first seeking food. Half-starved, coughing, sneezing, foul-tempered, sour-faced, they set out through the rain.

●

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Detective Stories



Why steal a corpse? The victim had been hit by a car, and badly mangled; the undertaker's restoration-job surely couldn't show any evidence of murder, if murder the accident had been. But John J. Edgar's remains, coffin and all, had been stolen from the funeral parlor, and the thief was willing to kill to prevent its return!

Feature Novel by Hunt Collins

Leading off the big current issue of

FAMOUS
DETECTIVE STORIES



DOWN TO EARTH

A Department For Science-Fictionists

(continued from page 8)

sume? It assumes that "Joe" wants some light reading for the train-ride; *therefore* he would not choose a science-fiction magazine. It assumes that "Joe" is attracted by a flashy cover; *therefore* he isn't interested in anything off the beaten path, or which might require a bit of thinking. It assumes that "Joe" wants interesting stories; *therefore*, science-fiction again is not for him. It assumes that "Joe" wants sexy stories; *therefore* he picks a magazine with a girly cover; *therefore*, he will feel cheated when he reads *Future*. All in all, since "Joe" picked a magazine with a girly cover, he *must* be some sort of dimwit.

Any or all of these assumptions might be correct for any given "Joe", but there are no grounds for considering them valid as general rules.

If, for example, "Joe" really wants sexy stories, then he would be disappointed with the stories he reads in *Future;* and he would also be disappointed with the stories in any other pulp magazine which has girly covers—you see them on most detective and mystery pulps, too. However, the odds are that, if Joe's interest is centered here, he won't bother with a fiction book at all; he'll pick up one of the many cheesecake magazines in the first place.

If you have examined the various detective pulps, you'll find that the stories inside cover a wide range; some are juvenile, but many are as "mature" as those to be found in the highbrow detective pocket-book magazines, with more conservative and "artistic" covers. The general sales-approach of the pulp magazine is that of concentrating on emotional appeal—both through the covers and the titles on the cover and the interior illustrations. The actual story-level is not necessarily that of the cover or the interior art, blurb, caption, or title.

Your logic assumes that science-fiction could only appeal to people of "superior" mentality, or high IQ, etc. And it further assumes that the kind of person who is capable of enjoying science fiction considers sex-appeal beneath their superior dignity.

This, again, may be true in individual cases, but you cannot make it a general rule. Yes, some readers do feel "ashamed" to be seen with a magazine that features girly covers. This is unfortunate in a number of ways, but the point to remember is that *most* of the members of the pulp-magazine audience do not suffer from this ailment; if they did, you wouldn't see girly covers on the detective pulps—or, if you did, you wouldn't see those magazines which insisted on using that type of cover coming out very long.

I'll admit without argument that *some* potential readers of *Future* may have been alienated by the pulp merchandizing approach; in some cases such people may never buy the magazine. In other cases, they may read a copy upon recommendation, or may happen upon a copy through other sources than purchasing it. And, if such persons enjoy the stories, they may have become buyers after all.

It's also true that a number of pulps employing the "snatch-sale" technique have failed. Aside from such instances where other factors were involved, I think that the reason for this was that, in the final analysis, the *story content* did not satisfy enough readers. You see, *most* of the letters we receive, arguing much along the lines that you have reasoned, end up with the same conclusion: "I like the stories, so I'll stick with you."

In reference to interior artwork, we've been having trouble recently because the only paper we could obtain did not "take" the type of artwork we've been using. Two of Virgil Finlay's finest illustrations—for *Future* and *Science Fiction Quarterly*, that is—came out so badly smeared that you'll have to take my word that they were good jobs. On the "cheesecake" angle—don't blame the artist, unless you think the picture is poorly drawn. The art and cover policies are outside the editor's province, although we do not have to have a luscious damsel in *every* drawing, and you'll notice that some haven't had them.

At least one of the contemporaries we've "outlasted, so far" presented covers without the girly angle in its last issues. Coincidence? *Maybe.*)

●

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

One of your readers, a Mr. R. A. Naumann, wrote me inquiring about the googol. I have answered him, and I thought you might be interested in the reply, so am sending a carbon on to you. Perhaps *Future's* readers may be interested, too.

Dear Mr. Naumann: I am glad to answer your query about the googol, but you have me scared, for I am not a mathematician and do not know what you will find acceptable as a legitimate source. However, my first brush with the googol

and the googoplex began in the late 1930's through an article which, from the brown condition of the paper, must have been either in a magazine called *Magazine Digest* or one called *World Digest*. (I believe there still is a *Magazine Digest*, but the quality of the paper has changed somewhat.) This is an article "By Dr. Edward Kasner, Columbia University, New York City. General Electric Science Forum (WGY)." Some time later, around 1945-6-7, perhaps, (unfortunately this clipping was taken before I adopted the habit of dating them) a query to the editor of *Popular Science* brought the same answer. Also, there has been a reference to the googol in *Life*, but that seems to be in one of the several hundred magazines still stacked in my attic awaiting assortment, for my filing system is a strictly one-man or man-and-wife affair. Finally, the book, *Mathematics and the Imagination*, by Edward Kasner and James Newman (Simon and Schuster, 1940) refers to the googol rather freely, particularly starting on page 23. And I'm afraid that's the total of my authority.... I'd be pleased to hear if a mathematician considers this a substantiation of the googol.

Noel Loomis

●

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

Your magazines somehow do not seem as satisfactory to me as do the majority of your competitors in the science-fiction field, although upon analyzing my reasons for feeling as I do, I cannot understand why. Certainly your fictional content, although not as great as it could be, is as good in quality as that of most of your competitors.

Perhaps it is the fact that the magazine is essentially the same *Future* that appeared on the scene ten years and more ago. Same editor, same general format, same general policies. And the magazines of ten years ago just do not stack up as well as they should when compared to those of today, with the possible exceptions of *Unknown*, *Astounding*, *Weird Tales*, and *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*.

Whatever the reason, the fact remains that should *Future* disappear entirely from the newsstands, I would not miss it.

Naturally, I have a few pet ideas which I think would vastly improve the magazine, and these I shall deal with in order. My biggest gripe is that of your calling novelets "novels". A novel should run at the very minimum fifty pages, and then it is little more than a novella. This practice was much more prevalent among the magazines of ten years ago than today, and is one of the prime factors which dates you in my mind.

Cover illustrations are my second large point of dissention with you. It is your stated claim that magazines in the science-fantasy field cannot break away from the girly style of cover until they are firmly established in the field, with a guaranteed circulation, and about ten or fifteen years of publication to back it up. This is pure poppycock, sir! Look at *Galaxy*. Look at *Other Worlds*. Look at *Weird Tales*. Yes, look at them, along with the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction;* three newcomers and one old-timer—and you still claim that the girly cover is a necessary evil?

My third gripe is that you don't give us enough for our money. Why not go up to 132 pages, like *Science Fiction Quarterly*, even if you have to charge an extra nickel, as you do there? Besides, in a way, you gypped us; the first three issues sold for fifteen cents, then the price jumped to twenty cents without warning.

At this point, I want to insert a plug for the ISFCC, the International Science Fiction Correspondence Club. This is not an organization for geniuses, who have their noses pointed in the general direction of the North Star, but is intended for the ordinary fan, who enjoys writing to and reading about others like himself.

There are no dues for this club. The only cash outlay is for a subscription to *Explorer*, the club magazine, for half-a-buck a year. If you desire any information, write to Ed Noble, Jr., Box 49, Girard, Penna. He is editor of the magazine. Or, better yet, write to me; if you live in Albany, or reasonably close, call me. My phone number is that of Thurlow Hall.

Robert P. Hoskins,
1 Thurlow Terrace,
Albany, New York

(While we are looking at *Galaxy*, and the other books you mention, let's note that *Galaxy's* price was also increased this year, without any addition in the number of pages. Was this a gyp? Of course not—no more than in the case of *Future!* Production costs, all along the line, keep going up—far in advance of circulation increases, no matter how favorable. I'm not a mind-reader, but I think it is safe to assume that the publishers of *Galaxy* did not want to cut down on the magazine; so, in order to continue it at the same level, they raised their price, as we did with *Future*.

Looking at the other books you mention; one is not a science-fiction magazine, and the other three are not pulps; they are displayed in different parts of newsstand layouts, and are thus not in the same class of competition as are the various pulp science-fiction magazines. Look at the science-fiction pulps, and you'll see that they all use "girly" covers—though not all exclusively—even though the approach may differ. I might add, that I don't plead the "girly" cover as a "necessary evil"—because I don't consider it an "evil" by any means.

I can't make a definite promise, but I'll see if we can do something about your first gripe, and consider the length of the stories we label as "novels". You'll see that, this time, we haven't listed any; in

the future I'll try, at the very least, to set a 20,000 word minimum for them. If there are still complaints, we'll raise the cellar on the length.

You say you rather like the stories we use, but somehow feel the magazine doesn't stack up. I myself have had that feeling about various magazines. I'd find enough enjoyable stories in each issue to consider that I'd had my money's worth, but still . . . somehow, I just didn't care too much for the book; I couldn't feel that I'd miss it if it softly and silently vanished away. And I suspect that it boiled down to the fact that either the book in question had no discernible personality, for me, or that I disliked one which was all too discernible. Perhaps this may be your feeling about *Future*. It may be just little things—like the matters you complained about—or it may be something which only a change in editorship could alter. I've seen that happen, too—a book which struck me much the same way *Future* does you would change skippers, and I find it becoming much more enjoyable—even though the general policy was not much different than before. Naturally, I hope such drastic measures won't be necessary to gain your affection, Mr. Hoskins!)

●

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I think it's about time for me to unveil my old portable again, now that you've finished off 1951 in such a successful manner. *Future*, in its ten issues so far, has begun to show a regular pattern. You work well within your limitations, without any pretentiousness, and still present a good product.

Item: In an era of 35c magazines, *Future* sells for 20c. This, of course, reduces the budget considerably.

Item: Despite this reduction in budget, you still manage to present the top names in science-fiction, with some of their best stories.

Item: Your greatest disadvantage is an inferior format. The budget, again, forces you to do this. Perhaps a raise in price to 25c would not be amiss—provided you were to add a few pages (I think 114 is about the minimum for the two-bits price) and find a better way of reproducing the interior art. Your interior artists (Finlay, Poulton, Luros) are tops; your cover artists (Luros, Morey, Bergey) are bottoms. You may be right that the action-triangle type of cover will sell magazines. Granted, but even so, said cover must be rendered in an artistic manner. Luros' September cover was about the best of a poor lot. Morey, who did fine work on the Teck *Amazing*, probably can still do it, given the opportunity.

Item: Your covers might be improved if you removed some of the lettering. The format of the July, 1951, cover—with the logo in a panel on top—is about the best. Try to keep the logo on a separate color strip, and not on the background of the painting. Wouldn't it be better just to give the title of the lead novel, and list other *authors*, (not titles) on a colored band along the bottom?

Item: You've tried to emphasize a complete break with the pre-war *Future*, by changing the format, re-numbering the volumes, and changing the titles. All well and good, but I think *Future Science Fiction Stories* would be infinitely better than the present extended title.

Item: The non-reprint policy is swell—I'm glad you saw your way clear after that lone error in November, 1950.

Final item: Your letter-column is fine, one of the best in the business, now that you've dropped the dianetics nonsense. It has no more place in a science-fiction magazine than would a debate on methods of applied psychology.

Bob Silverberg,
760 Montgomery Street,
Brooklyn 18, N. Y.

(Just for the records, we ran two reprints in *Future;—Caridi Shall Not Die*, in the November, 1950 issue, and *The Barbarians* in the January, 1951, issue—before the response was definite enough to make a decision on the practice. So far as your suggestions on the covers go, all I can promise is to discuss the matter with the art department.)

●

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I am now preparing for publication, as a hard-cover book, an *Index to the Science-Fiction Magazines*. Started in 1935, it covers all the American science-fiction, and most of the fantasy magazines, from 1926 through 1950. *Future*, and 43 other publications are listed—over 1250 magazines in all. All stories and articles are listed alphabetically, both by author and title, and there will be checklists of all magazines indexed.

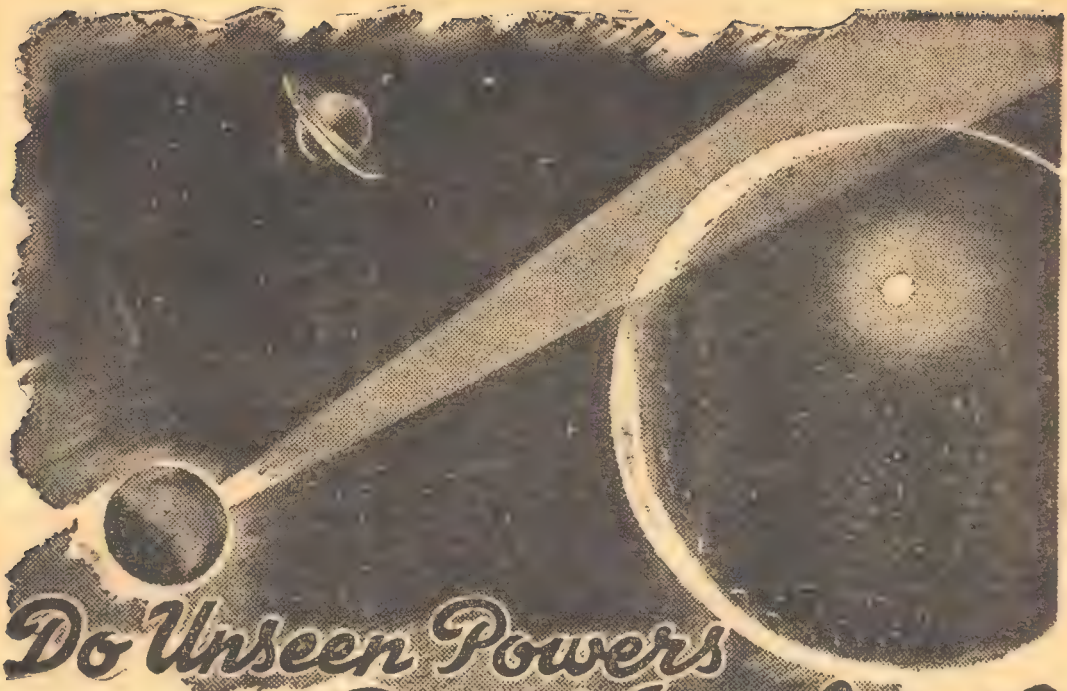
In addition, it is desired to include all the information on pseudonyms that can definitely be verified. To insure correctness, only data from such first-hand sources as the authors themselves, editors, and agents will be used.

Therefore, I would like to ask that all authors who have ever used pen-names in the science-fiction or fantasy fields send the information to me at the address below. In the case of personal pseudonyms, the name alone is sufficient; where stories appeared under "house names", I will need the title of each story, together with the by-line under which it appeared.

Since transcription of the final copy from the file cards will begin shortly after the first of the year, the sooner this information is received, the more certain it is of inclusion.

Donald B. Day,
3435 NE 38th Avenue,
Portland 13, Oregon.

[*Turn To Page* 86]



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●

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I am still a steady reader, though it has been several months since last I wrote you. This issue, I enjoyed Robert Marlow's letter; now, there's an impartial critic who works for the good of the home team! For myself, I feel that as long as I can't write this type of story—or any other, for that matter—I'll just keep applauding those who try and do well enough to get their stories printed. If they didn't have something on the ball, you'd surely not give them that chance. This philosophy stems from the days when I packed my own grips and trouped in vaudeville. Such old-timers all felt that way about it . . . everything for the good of the act, and if you're in the audience, don't sit on your hands. They'll do better if you encourage 'em!

The review of *The World of Null-A* reminds me of an anecdote. A lady I once knew, who was "able to contact the inner world", (as she put it) wrote me that during one of these periods, a greyish cloud appeared in her room. She wanted to step into it, but was warned not to. She argued with her "voice" and begged and pleaded to experiment somehow with the thing; finally, she was told she could slip her hand in and out of it, but she must do this very quickly. This she did, and the withdrawn hand had a tingling sensation in the fingertips. Putting on the light, she saw that the surface of the nails had been chewed, as though scraped much too thin with a razor blade, and had to be dressed and taped up for healing. I visited her shortly after that experience, and saw the sore fingertips myself. The voice told her it was one of the "worlds of AO", and that there were many of them. So, whether it is generally believed, it is something to ponder—what?

The Henderson story, *A Secondary First*, was highly enjoyable. I do like a sprinkling of humor, and I think that by the time we are advanced enough to live in the eons of the future, we will all have better appreciation for it. It surely will not be all seriousness. All our greatest minds are known for being able to fill in with laughs, aren't they?

The illustrations melt me down . . . so-o *pretty!* (I'm tempted to take water colors and play with them . . . or crayons . . . or something.

Ann Nelson,
714 Carondelet,
New Orleans, La.

(Your account of the lady and her fingers reminds me of the gentleman who claimed he could make gold. He produced a lump of a substance which looked like gold, and the investigators gave it all the tests they could imagine. "It's gold, all right," they agreed finally, "but that doesn't prove that you made it!")

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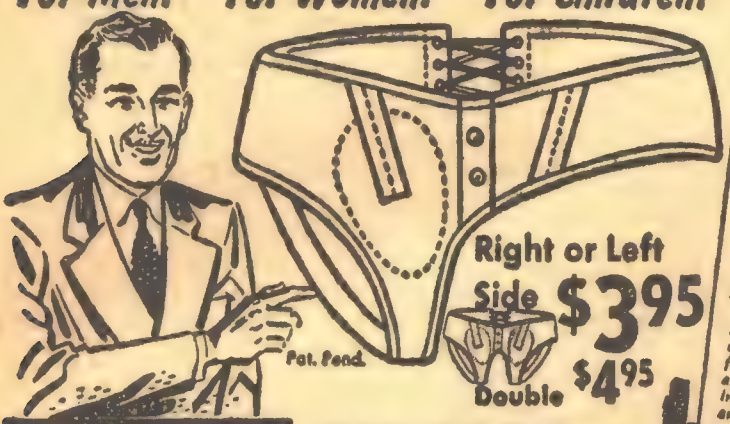
[*Turn To Page* 88]

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M. S. of Anderson, Ind., thanks us and says: "It is one of the finest things I have ever worn and has made my life worth living. It has given me untold ease and comfort."

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Dear Mr. Lowndes:

In perusing Mr. Payne's letter, on page 96 of your November 1951 issue, I was somewhat astounded by his statements.

His naive statement, "I knew that it was impossible for a spaceship to achieve the speed of light, etc."—he obviously believes too much. No one knows, actually, if attaining the speed of light is impossible; all is mere theory, and theory isn't proof. And, if I may be so bold, I might say that light attains the speed of light, so certainly other objects need not be exempt.

Also, please observe that light can exert force; it can push. Does it not, then, have mass? Perhaps a light wave is only a particle of matter—energy, travelling at "light speed".

I wonder who these "learned" persons are he mentioned. I happen to have read the Einstein book written for the layman—it's a bit harder the other way—and it appears to me that the mass is gained gradually as the speed increases. Certainly it appears illogical to assume that it would commence gaining mass suddenly.

And who, I wonder, are those who ignore the physics definition of "mass" and assert in their stories that a spaceship would gain infinite size? Infinite mass isn't infinite size. Let us say, instead, that it is the density and weight which would increase.

Maneuvering back to Mr. Payne: wouldn't the fuel also acquire infinite mass at light speed? Wouldn't that give it infinite push?

Notice to all who babble about hyper-space: did any of you figure that a variation in Planck's constant could mean hyper-space?

Ah, but the hell with it. The real purpose of this letter is to congratulate the editor; with your present issue, you have won me over as a regular purchaser.

I wouldn't claim that your magazine has an eminent position, but it surely does have one overwhelmingly good attribute: an intelligent, determined editor with good taste. That's not a compliment, merely a statement of fact.

Edward G. von Seibel,
Box 445,
Olivehurst, California.

(Thanks for the statement of fact, but 'tis only fair to note that what may be "fact" for you, sir, in this framework, may not be "fact" for others. See Mr. Hoskins' letter.)

●

Dear Lowndes:

Something tells me that brother Henderson has read quite a bit of science-fiction. Perhaps he's written some, too, and re-read his own former offerings. At any rate, *A Secondary First* gave me a good laugh, and the footnotes had a refreshing candor about them—particularly after

[*Turn To Page* 90]



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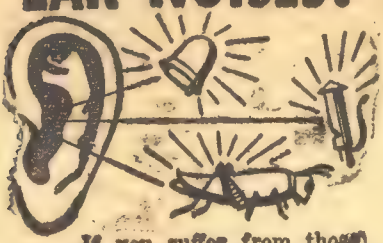
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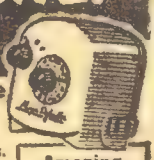
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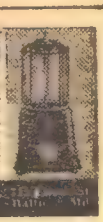
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some of the stuffy "explanations" of various authors' devices which I've suffered through. But I suppose it would be too much to hope that Henderson will have started a new trend.

I check you on the "sheer story interest" angle often overcoming characterization defects, but wasn't Mr. Cairns' whole point that this shouldn't be an excuse any longer? Take *Dark Recess*—well, I'd say that the story interest *did* sort of make up for stock characters, but the story wasn't that overpoweringly good. I enjoyed it, as I enjoy nearly all of the overly-abused George O. Smith's efforts, but dammit all, he can do better; I've seen him do better, and not just once. So I blame you, Sir editor, and not Smith this time.

Wallace McKinley,
New Canaan, Conn.

(Your comment is as distressing as it is correct, Sir Wallace; I'll try not to repeat the offense.)

Dear Sirs:

I have just finished reading the first edition of *Future* to reach the bookstalls here, and feel that I must express my appreciation of an excellent magazine. Since it was the first, I am unable to complete the comparison coupon, but by comparison with some of the magazines originating here in England—and, I might say, some of the other American magazines on sale here—yours certainly shows up very well indeed.

On reading through your correspondents' letters, I find an objection to the "lurid" cover. Why the doubts? Is it that the families of some of your readers are narrow-minded? My experience of "Yanks"—particularly in action in Europe during the late war—seems to belie that theory. For my part, let's have covers as bright as possible; we know the quality of the stuff between the covers, and any extra color in our more-or-less drab lives is a good thing.

Wm. A. E. Halliday,
41 Mersey Road, Walthamstow,
London, E. 17, England

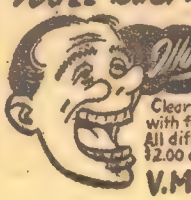
Dear Mr. Lowndes:

It has been quite a while since my last letter reached you, and, in the meantime I have been reading your magazine quite diligently. I am chock full of comments, which will come later. But, it is my belief that unless a letter has some critical value, it is of no worth (in printing, I mean).

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[*Turn To Page 92*]

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zine is the selection of stories. A noticeable thing is that too many times your stories consist of fillers. The ideas and characterizations are almost childish. But the November issue was very good.

Format: Terrible! The titles of the stories are really *blared* out at the reader. It reminds me of a circus barker. And *two* blurbs, too! The reproduction of illustrations is disgusting. Mr. Finlay must have felt pretty bad towards you after doing what you did to his picture. Suggestion: although it is rather high-handed, I recommend a change of print and paper. The cost can be levelled by upping your price a nickel.

Illustrations: Milton Luros is not a science-fiction artist. You need new blood in the art department. Suggestions: Use the Arftroms and a few of the old veterans.

Editorial handling: It is my pleasure to tell you that your editorship is outstanding in one sense. You are not a back-slapper. What I mean is that RWL does not say, "Ours is the best magazine on the stand." You are very sparse in telling your readers that *Future* is the top magazine in science-fiction. Too many editors smugly believe that their magazine is the only one: *each one is tops in its own sense!*

Letter section: This is my main gripe! Out of the comments in their entirety, this is something which *really* needs attention. The writers are composed basically of one group...and that group: everyone is a member of the *Cymini Sectores Club* (hair-splitters).

A single letter is usually composed out of a typographical error in a published story. If the writer *dares* to include something in his manuscript against known laws, the *Cymini Sectores* springs into action. And, worst of all, their letters are printed.

Suggestion: Put critical letters in "Down to Earth". It seems to me the column is trying to imitate "Brass Tacks". (At least, they know what they are talking about, there.)

Last, but not least, covers: gaaaaah!

Philip Brantingham,
1517 Lincoln Avenue,
Calumet City, Illinois

(Mr. Halliday finds nothing basically wrong with our cover approach; you wince. This is a typical example of the divided opinion on the subject, which we receive virtually every week; often, in opening the mail, we will come upon such letters successively.

One matter, however, is being rectified: we are going to try to keep the story-titles from running into and overpowering the picture, leaving more air-space between type and illustration than before. The cover on this issue is a step, but we intend to avoid as large type as we have for "Devil's Cargo", for example.

No reader, or Mr. Finlay himself, was

[*Turn To Page 94*]

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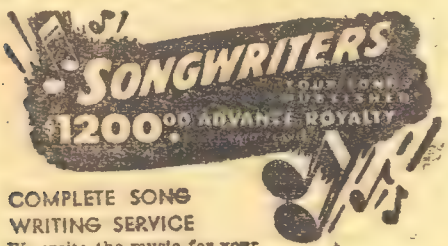


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more outraged than your editor at the reproduction of the illustrations in our September and November issues. Unfortunately, we had no advance warning of what was to come, and since the book is prepared quite a time in advance, it was not possible to alter the artwork in the November issue when we saw how it came out in September. In the January *Future*, you can see that steps had been taken; we had the artists work directly for reproduction under our circumstances, and generally, the results were more satisfactory. Peculiarly enough, you'll see that Finlay's intricate line-work—both in brush and pen—came out cleanly, while the stipple smeared. So, now we know: we can't use grease-pencil or stipple.

Some, like yourself, have complained about Mr. Luros' illustrations, but as many more have praised them, and we really feel that he is beginning to hit his stride in science-fiction illustration. One thing that has endeared him to us is the fact that, except for a couple of bad spots in the very first issue, where the inking of the magazine seemed to have been at fault, his artwork has given no reproduction-trouble. A number of very fine science-fiction artists are either unavailable to us, or their technique is such as would not reproduce on our paper. True, we could ask such artists to change their styles—but, after all, in many cases it has been these very styles which have made their reputation. And what is the use of having a picture signed by the name of an illustrator whose work has always delighted you, if the picture does not show the very elements which made you ask for him? A good commercial artist *can* handle many styles, true—but you readers tend to identify an individual artist by particular traits, and rightly so. What do you think of Mr. Luros' illustration in the February *Science Fiction Quarterly*?

On the double-blurb question, I'd like to hear from more readers. Yours is the first complaint, and it may be that others have been suffering in silence—although, frankly, I find this difficult to believe. Science-fiction readers may be long-suffering in some respects, but from my experience, they aren't reticent in airing their grief. The reason for the extra blurb? Well, those of you who recall the earliest science-fiction magazines, may remember that blurbs therein were longish, and concerned themselves with discussing scientific and other intellectual aspects of the stories. Later, the conventional pulp blurb replaced this. Personally, I've missed the oldtime blurb, even though I could see the logic of the other kind. So we tried adding the oldtime blurb to the usual one. The layouts in the first few issues of volume two tended to be crowded and cluttered; now, you see that the extra blurb is on another page.

What do you readers think? Is the extra blurb a waste of space and of your time? It's extra work for the editor, of course, but I wanted to give *Future* an added and

individual distinction. I'll continue or drop it according to your preferences.

The letter section has to be made up within a specified time, and I can only select from letters received by that time. Some months, the coupons pour in, while others see letters predominant. Some months, the letters are nearly all just-listings of "I like this; I don't like that", with little general discussion—or little material in one letter that is not repeated in another; other months, it's all discussion, and little comment on the book itself. Again, there's likely to be a great deal of repetition; I don't think you want to read the same letter, phrased differently, a dozen times in one issue. It may be fun for the writer, but it makes for boredom. I try to avoid *sameness* in the letter-section as I do in the story-selections—but, in both cases, I can only select the best available to me at the time.

I think your point to the effect that every magazine is "tops" in its own way, is a good one, on an absolute scale. In this reference, one issue of *Future*, or *Astounding, Thrilling Wonder, Science Fiction Quarterly, Startling*, and so on can only be compared with other issues of the same book. But this is a competitive field, and while it is true that some science-fiction readers read them all, many, if not most, will only take a few, or even one. Naturally, we want *Future* and *Science Fiction Quarterly* to be on the preferred list.

I've never believed in trying to tell the readers that "ours is the best"; it strikes me as an insult to the readers' intelligence—for if the claim is true, or reasonably close to truth, the reader doesn't have to be told. If the book isn't anything of the kind, then it's ridiculous pretensiousness, and the reader will rightly resent it. That's one thing about a blowhard—he *can* get away with boasting, even be applauded for it, so long as he's so right that you can't deny it. But let him slip just once! Consider the fate of Chuck Dressen and the Brooklyn Dodgers!)

●

Dear RWL:

The November 1951 issue of *Future* is, I think, probably the best issue you have produced thus far. Of course, as you mentioned in answer to my letter in that issue, what I personally believe to have been the best may very well prove to have been the worst to someone else.

I believe there are a few improvements which you would do well to mark, even at the risk of upping the price to 25c. It would be well worth it.

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2) The art department should either use a new artist or change their present layout plans. The covers are much too suggestive of a "transplanted western", and could be much more attractive. I know this isn't your department, but something should be done about it.

3) Stories: the all-important part of any magazine. As I've said before, they are improving. However, they *could* be better. Of the stories in this issue, I rate them (1) *Experiment in Genius.* This one seemed to drag in spots, but was very readable. (2) *Voices in the Void.* The idea wasn't clearly defined, but what it lacked in that, it more than made up for in writing. More, please! (3) *The Way Back.* No comment. (4) *A Secondary First.* Didn't agree with me. Pen-name? (5) *Ismail, the Outworlder.* This is exactly the type of thing I think you should steer clear of; nothing but words.

The article by de Camp was very interesting. I would like to see more, if possible. While on the subject of articles, Willy Ley is also adept at them—especially on rocketry.

"Down to Earth", as always, was interesting, as well as thought-provoking. Why not lengthen it?

Robert Marlow: You seem to go to a great deal of trouble to prove how intelligently you caught the "mistakes" in *Out of the Atomfire.* If you enjoy a story, who cares whether or not a photon is a unit of light intensity?

John Cairns: I agree—particularly with your final sentence.

Jan Romanoff,
26601 So. Western, Apt. 341,
Lomita, California

(Quite right, Mr. Romanoff. Some didn't think the November *Future* was anywhere near our best issue! . . . True, we have a contents page: but no one is going to know what is on it unless they *pick up the magazine.* That is the first step in selling the book—to get the prospective buyer to pick it up. Some will reach for their change-pocket as soon as they see a new issue of *Future* on sale; fine, but there are others who will look over *several* magazines before picking one up. That is the reason for the triple-approach: cover illustration, story titles and author-names, and interior artwork, as well as the contents page. We hope the outside will lead the looker to pick up the magazine, and that the appearance of the inside will make him grasp it firmly while he planks down the price thereof. We feel that *good stories,* will retain the person who is already "sold", but *we want to appeal to the intelligent pulp-reader who is not already a devotee of science-fiction.* That means presenting him with a pulp magazine in appearance; but it doesn't mean writing down to the level of the most juvenile of pulp standards. It seems to me that the old-fashioned juvenile pulp is pretty much a thing of the past.)

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—1. DEVIL'S CARGO — Wilson

—2. THE TINKERER — Lombino

—3. GO TO THE ANT — Kubilius

—4. CAPTAIN BARNES AND THE LAW — Roman

—5. FOUNTAIN OF DEATH — Farrell

—6. BEAUTIFUL, BEAUTIFUL, BEAUTIFUL! — Friedman

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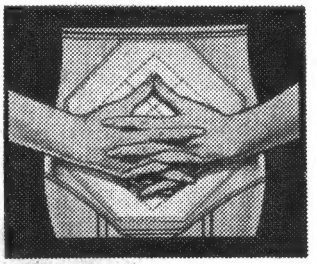
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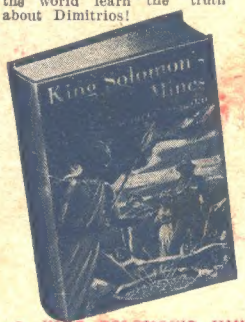
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